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Understanding China's Political System

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Summary

This report is designed to provide Congress with a perspective on the contemporary political system of China, the only Communist Party-led state in the G-20 grouping of major economies. China's Communist Party dominates state and society in China, is committed to maintaining a permanent monopoly on power, and is intolerant of those who question its right to rule. Nonetheless, analysts consider China's political system to be neither monolithic nor rigidly hierarchical. Jockeying among leaders and institutions representing different sets of interests is common at every level of the system.

The report opens with a brief overview of China's leading political institutions. They include the Communist Party and its military, the People's Liberation Army; the State, led by the State Council, to which the Party delegates day-to-day administration of the country; and the National People's Congress (NPC), China's unicameral legislature. On paper, the NPC has broad powers. In practice, the legislature is controlled by the Communist Party and is able to exercise little of its constitutionally mandated oversight over the state and the judiciary. Following its 18th Congress in November 2012, the Communist Party ushered in a new Party leadership. New State and NPC leaders took office following the opening session of the 12th NPC in March 2013.

Following the overview, this report introduces a number of distinct features of China's formal political culture and discusses some of their implications for U.S.-China relations. Those features include the fact that China is led not by one leader, but by a committee of seven; that the military is not a national army, but rather an armed wing of the Communist Party; that provincial leaders are powerful players in the system; and that ideology continues to matter in China, with the Communist Party facing vocal criticism from its left flank each time it moves even further away from its Marxist roots. Other themes include the role of meritocracy as a form of legitimization for one-party rule, and ways in which meritocracy is being undermined; the introduction of an element of predictability into elite Chinese politics through the enforcement of term and age limits for holders of public office; the Chinese system's penchant for long-term planning; and the system's heavy emphasis on maintaining political stability. The next section of the report discusses governance challenges in the Chinese political system, from "stove-piping" and bureaucratic competition, to the distorting influence of bureaucratic rank, to factionalism, corruption, and weak rule of law.

The second half of the report is devoted to detailed discussion of China's formal political structures—the Party, the military, the State, the National People's Congress, a consultative body known as the China People's Political Consultative Conference, and China's eight minor political parties, all of which are loyal to the Communist Party. Also discussed are other political actors who play a role in influencing policy debates, including the media, big business, research institutes, university academics, associations, and grassroots non-governmental organizations. The report concludes with a discussion of prospects for political reform, noting that while China's new Communist Party chief has called for everyone to be bound by the constitution and law, Party policy is to reject vigorously the notion of a multi-party system, separation of powers, a bicameral legislature, or a federal system, on the grounds that all are unsuited to China's conditions.

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Introduction

This report is designed to provide Congress with a perspective on the contemporary political system of China, the world's second-largest economic power, one of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and the only Communist Party-led state in the G-20 grouping of major economies.¹ By introducing some of the distinct features and governance challenges of China's political culture, the report aims to help Congress understand the ways in which political actors in China interact, or in some cases, fail to interact, with implications for China's relationship with its neighbors and the world. By introducing some of the leading political institutions and political actors in China, the report aims to help Congress understand where Chinese interlocutors sit within the Chinese political system, gauge their relative influence, and judge the authoritativeness of their statements with respect to official policy. Where appropriate, the report also seeks to highlight ways in which China's political culture affects official Chinese interactions with the U.S. government.

The **Chinese Communist Party (CCP or Party)** has been in power in China for 63 years, a record of longevity that rivals and could in six years surpass that of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.² The CCP assumed power in 1949 by means of a civil war victory over the forces of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists, who moved the seat of their Republic of China government to the island of Taiwan. The Communists named their new regime the People's Republic of China (PRC). Although the CCP has been continually in power since, China's political institutions and political culture have evolved significantly over those decades, with the CCP's willingness to adapt helping to explain why it has, so far at least, avoided the fate of its sister parties in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Today, although the Party is committed to maintaining a permanent monopoly on power and is intolerant of those who question its right to rule, analysts consider the political system to be neither monolithic nor rigidly hierarchical. Jockeying among leaders and institutions representing different sets of interests is common at every level of the system. Sometimes fierce competition exists among the members of the Communist Party's seven-man Politburo Standing Committee and 25-member Politburo, China's highest decision-making bodies. It also exists among ministries; between ministries and provincial governments, which are equals in bureaucratic rank; among provinces; and among the headquarters departments and service branches of the military. The military and the Foreign Ministry are often on different pages. Deputies to the National People's Congress, China's weak legislature, sometimes attempt to push back against the government, the courts, and the public prosecutor's office. As part of a trend of very modest political pluralization, moreover, other political actors are increasingly able to influence policy debates. Such actors, who may join forces to advance particular causes, include an increasingly diverse media, micro-bloggers, state-owned and private corporations, official and quasi-official

¹ The world's other remaining Communist Party-led states are Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam, none of which is a member of the G-20. The G-20 countries are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

² The Soviet Union was established in 1922 and collapsed in 1991. Its ruling Communist Party, in power for 69 years, was initially called the Russian Communist Party. It changed its name in 1925 to the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and in 1952 to Communist Party of the Soviet Union. China's ruling party has kept the same name throughout its history. It is sometimes referred to as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and sometimes as the Communist Party of China (CPC). Official Chinese documents most often use the latter formulation. This report uses the former.

research institutes, university academics, officially sponsored associations and societies, and grassroots non-governmental organizations.

One test of a political system is its ability to manage political transitions. In the run-up to a once-in-a-decade change in the Communist Party's leadership in November 2012, Communist Party Politburo member and Chongqing Municipality Party Secretary Bo Xilai fell from grace, exposing at least one serious rift in the leadership, raising questions about the unity and probity of China's remaining leaders, and, because of Bo's ties to senior military figures, raising questions about the loyalty of parts of the military to the central Party authorities. (See text box on p. 19.) In the same period, the leadership was also shaken by revelations in the foreign media about the vast personal fortunes amassed by relatives of the outgoing premier, Wen Jiabao, and the incoming Party General Secretary, Xi Jinping.³ Despite the turmoil in its top ranks, the Party convened its 18th National Congress in November 2012 without public displays of discord, and immediately afterwards appointed a new leadership. Xi Jinping was named both General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the body that oversees the military, the Party's Central Military Commission. He added the title of State President at the first session of the 12th National People's Congress in March 2013. The NPC meeting also produced a new Premier of the State Council, Li Keqiang, and other new top state officials.

Many analysts, both in China and abroad, have questioned the long-term viability of China's current political system, in which the Party remains above the law, leadership politics is a black box, and civil society and the right to free speech and association are severely constrained. While he was in office, China's recently retired Premier, Wen Jiabao, called for political reform, including reform of "the leadership system of the party and the state," warning that, "Without the success of political structural reform, it is impossible for us to fully institute economic structural reform. The gains we have made in reform and development may be lost, new problems that have cropped up in China's society cannot be fundamentally resolved and such historical tragedy as the Cultural Revolution may happen again."⁴ Wen never elaborated, though, on precisely what sort of political reform he hoped to see.

China's new Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping raised hopes for a change in the Communist Party's relationship to the law when he called in December 2012 for full implementation of China's state constitution and declared that, "No organization or individual has the special right to overstep the Constitution and law, and any violation of the Constitution and the law must be investigated."⁵ Xi has also repeatedly mentioned the need for the Party to police itself, rather than allowing any outside body to do so, however. Perhaps tellingly, in a January 2013 speech, he urged Party organizations and members to abide not by the state constitution, but rather by the Party's constitution, a separate document.⁶ The apparent contradictions among Xi's statements make his attitude toward political reform unclear.

³ David Barboza, "Billions in Hidden Riches for Family of Chinese Leader," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2012; Michael Forsythe, Shai Oster, Natasha Khan, and Dune Lawrence, "Xi Jinping Millionaire Relations Reveal Fortunes of Elite," *Bloomberg*, June 29, 2012.

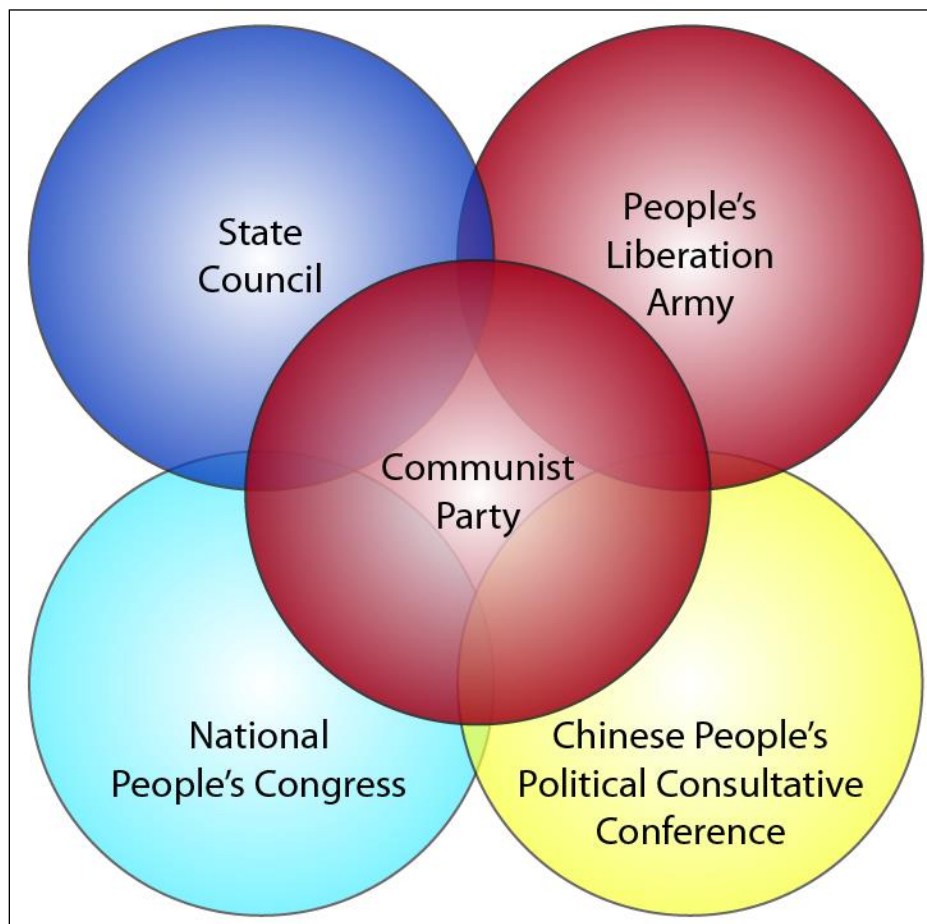
⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Premier Wen Jiabao Meets the Press," transcript, March 15, 2012, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t914983.htm>.

⁵ "CPC's new chief pledges to implement rule of law," *Xinhua News Agency*, December 4, 2012; Zhao Yanan, "Uphold Constitution, Xi says," *China Daily*, December 5, 2012.

⁶ "Xi Jinping vows 'power within cage of regulations'," *Xinhua News Agency*, January 22, 2013. According to Xinhua, "Xi stressed all Party organs and members should strictly enforce Party discipline, abide by its Constitution, and implement the Party's theories, line, principles and policies."

Overview of China's Political Institutions

Figure 1. China's Leading Political Institutions
The Communist Party dominates the Chinese political system



Source: CRS research.

True to its Leninist roots, the Chinese Communist Party dominates state and society in China. Its power rests on four pillars: its control of China's approximately 2.25 million person-strong military, the **People's Liberation Army (PLA)**, its 1.5 million person-strong paramilitary force, the **People's Armed Police**, and its 800,000 other internal security forces;⁷ its control of personnel appointments across all political institutions, the military, state-owned corporations, and public institutions; its control of the media; and its control of the judiciary and the internal security apparatus. (For discussion of the Party organs in charge of these functions, see "The Party Bureaucracy.") The Party's leadership role is referenced five times in the preamble to the

⁷ Figures for force size from Richard D. Fisher, Jr., *China's Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach* (Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 5. The 2006 edition of China's Defense White Paper stated that the PLA had 2.3 million troops and the PAP had a force size of 600,000. Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in 2006*, White Paper, December 29, 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/book/194421.htm>.

PRC's 1982 constitution, but is not mentioned in any of the articles of the constitution, creating ambiguity about the legal basis for the Party's vast powers.⁸

The Party entrusts implementation of its policies and day-to-day administration of the country to the institution of the **State**, headed by the State Council and including the State's ministries and commissions and layers of "people's governments" below the national level. The top State officials at every level of administration usually concurrently hold senior Party posts, to ensure Party control.

According to China's state constitution, the **National People's Congress (NPC)** oversees the State Council, as well as four other institutions: the Presidency, the Supreme People's Court, the public prosecutors' office, and the military. In practice, the NPC, like People's Congresses at every level of administration, is controlled by the Communist Party and is able to exercise little oversight over any of the institutions officially under its supervision. NPC deputies are expected to approve all budgets, agency reports, and personnel appointments put before them. The NPC's most significant power is its ability to initiate and shape legislation.

The formal political system also includes two other categories of institutions, although they have little substantive power. The first is People's Political Consultative Conferences (PPCCs), the most senior level of which is known as the **Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee**. The Party and State ostensibly "consult" with PPCCs on policy issues.⁹ The second set of institutions is China's eight **minor political parties**, known as the "democratic parties." All the parties were established before the Communists came to power, pledge loyalty to the Communist Party, and accept its leadership. The existence of the PPCCs and the minor parties allows the Communist Party to describe China's political system as one of "multi-party cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China."¹⁰

Features of China's Formal Political Culture

The formal Chinese political system has a number of distinct features. Awareness of these features can be helpful for congressional interactions with Chinese officials and institutions, and can inform Congress's understanding of official Chinese behavior.

Collective Leadership

China has had no supreme leader since the death of Deng Xiaoping in 1997. The seven men who sit on the country's most senior decision-making body, the Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee (PSC),¹¹ form a collective leadership in which each man has a rank, from one to

⁸ The full English-language text of the 1982 state constitution and its subsequent amendments can be accessed on the website of the People's Daily, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party Central Committee, at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>. The clearest statement in the constitution mandating continued Communist Party rule reads: "Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, the Chinese people of all nationalities will continue to adhere to the people's democratic dictatorship and follow the socialist road...." Chinese critics of one Party rule sometimes make their case obliquely by calling for revision of the Preamble to the Constitution.

⁹ The People's Congresses extend down to the township level, one level above the village, and the People's Political Consultative Conferences extend down to the county level, one level above the township.

¹⁰ See discussion of this concept on an authorized Chinese government portal site operated by the CCP's external propaganda arm, the State Council Information Office: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/Political/29034.htm>.

¹¹ The Politburo Standing Committee is also known as the Political Bureau Standing Committee.

seven, and shoulders primary responsibility for a specific portfolio. (See **Table 1** for the names and offices of all seven members.) Party General Secretary Xi Jinping is ranked first among the seven and has responsibility for convening PSC and larger Politburo meetings. He also controls some of the most consequential portfolios, including military and foreign affairs. Unlike his predecessor, who had to wait two years after becoming head of Party to be named head of the military, Xi was awarded the top military post immediately upon taking over leadership of the Party, a development that has enhanced his authority. Like all his colleagues, however, Xi must still win consensus from the rest of the group for major decisions. Forging agreement can be difficult, in part because members of the PSC owe their jobs to horse trading among different constituencies, interest groups, and influential retired Party elders, whose interests they represent informally on the PSC.¹²

Table 1. The 18th Central Committee's Politburo Standing Committee
All Were Appointed at the First Plenum of the 18th Central Committee in November 2012

Name (family name is listed first)	Party position(s)	Birthdate ^a	Other titles	Portfolio
Xi Jinping	General Secretary of the Communist Party; Chairman of the Party Central Military Commission	June 1953	State President; Chairman of the State Military Commission	The Communist Party and foreign and military affairs
Li Keqiang	No. 2 Ranked Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) Member	July 1955	Premier and Party Secretary of the State Council	Government administration and the economy
Zhang Dejiang	No. 3 Ranked PSC Member	November 1946	Chairman, Standing Committee of the 12 th National People's Congress	Legislative affairs
Yu Zhengsheng	No. 4 Ranked PSC Member.	April 1945	Chairman, 12 th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	Relations with non-communists
Liu Yunshan	No. 5 Ranked PSC Member; Member of the Party Secretariat; President of the Central Party School	July 1945		Party affairs
Wang Qishan	No. 6 Ranked Member of the PSC; Secretary of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission	July 1948		Party discipline and fighting corruption
Zhang Gaoli	No. 7 Ranked Member of the PSC	November 1946	No. 1 Ranked Vice Premier	Assisting the Premier; the economy

¹² For more information about the dynamics of the PSC, see Alice L. Miller, "The Politburo Standing Committee under Hu Jintao," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35 (September 21, 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/93646>. The authors are grateful to Prof. Joseph Fewsmith of Boston University for insights into this topic.

Source: Website of the Communist Party's mouthpiece, *The People's Daily*, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/>.

- a. Because of age limits for senior offices, all those born before 1950 are expected to retire at the next Party Congress, in 2017. Only Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are expected to continue serving.

The collective leadership feature of the Chinese political system is designed to guard against a repeat of the excesses of the era of the PRC's founding father, Mao Zedong, when a single out-sized leader was able to convulse the nation with a series of mass political campaigns. It is also meant to guard against the emergence in China of a figure like Mikhail Gorbachev, whose decisions are widely blamed in China for the collapse of the Soviet Union. Before his death in 1997, China's supreme leader, Deng Xiaoping, served as the ultimate check on the power of the Party general secretary, cashiering two reformist General Secretaries, Hu Yaobang in 1987 and Zhao Ziyang in 1989, before settling on Jiang Zemin in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. It is unclear whether Jiang, age 86, or other retired leaders would today have the authority to remove the general secretary if he were to pursue policies with which they profoundly disagreed.

The Military as an Armed Wing of the Communist Party

China's military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), is not a national army belonging to the state. Rather, it is an armed wing of the Communist Party, with the Party's exercise of "absolute leadership" over the military a fundamental guarantee of Communist Party rule. The PLA's willingness to put the Communist Party's interests first was tested in 1989, when the Party ordered tanks into the streets of Beijing to clear unarmed protestors from Tiananmen Square. The PLA did as the Party ordered, killing hundreds of protestors in the process—no authoritative death toll has ever been released. The PLA also served the Party by enforcing seven months of martial law in the capital before and after the killings, even though its actions badly damaged the PLA's image within China and around the world.

A heavy emphasis on political indoctrination—and particularly on the need for the PLA to be unswervingly loyal to the Communist Party—has been a hallmark of the PLA from its earliest days. Among the five "core values" for the military outlined by China's most recent Party and military chief, Hu Jintao, "loyalty to the Party" came first, ahead of "ardent love for the people," and "service to the country."¹³ In remarks to troops in December 2012, China's new top Party and military leader, Xi Jinping, described obeying the Party's command as "the soul of the military" and the military's ability to engage in combat and win battles as a "top priority."¹⁴

A major tool for Party control of the military is the General Political Department (GPD), one of the four "general departments" of the PLA headquarters, all of which are represented on the Party's Central Military Commission. Among other things, the GPD is responsible for political training and military personnel matters, including management of personnel dossiers, promotions, and job assignments. GPD political commissars (known at lower levels as political directors and political instructors) serve side-by-side with military commanders at all levels of the PLA, and head the Party committees in all PLA units. Almost all PLA officers are Party members.¹⁵ Only

¹³ James Mulvenon, "Hu Jintao and the 'Core Values of Military Personnel,'" *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 28 (May 8, 2009).

¹⁴ "Xi Orders PLA to Intensify Combat Awareness," *Xinhua News Agency*, December 12, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-12/12/c_132036566.htm.

¹⁵ Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 33-34.

two uniformed officers serve on the Party's Politburo, however, and none serve on China's most senior leadership body, the Politburo Standing Committee.

Scholars and others in China have sometimes broached the possibility of strengthening the PLA's institutional ties to the State by "de-politicizing" it, or "nationalizing" it. The Party has repeatedly rejected such notions. In 2012, at a press conference marking the 85th anniversary of the founding of the PLA, a military spokesman denounced talk of de-politicization as "erroneous ideas" raised with "ulterior motives."¹⁶ Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping reportedly confirmed his opposition to de-politicization in leaked remarks in December 2012 in which he blamed the collapse of the Soviet Union on Moscow's decision to depoliticize the Soviet military.¹⁷

The Legislature: Strong on Paper, Weak in Practice

China's 1982 state constitution, adopted six years after the death of Mao Zedong, describes the country's unicameral legislature, the National People's Congress, as "the highest organ of state power." The constitution gives the NPC the power to amend the constitution; supervise its enforcement; enact and amend laws; ratify and abrogate treaties; approve the state budget and plans for national economic and social development; elect and impeach top officials of the state and judiciary; and supervise the work of the State Council, the State Central Military Commission, the Supreme People's Court, and the Supreme People's Procuratorate. In reality, however, the NPC exercises many of those powers in name only.

One major reason for the NPC's weakness is the Communist Party's insistence that it serve as little more than a rubber stamp for Party decisions. While the constitution gives the NPC the right to "elect" such top state officials as the President, Vice President, and Chairman of the State Central Military Commission, for example, in practice, the Party decides who will fill those positions. The NPC's role is simply to ratify the Party's decisions.

Some analysts see a related reason for the NPC's weakness in the dual identity of most of its deputies and the way they are "elected." The Party nominates all candidates for positions as deputies, usually nominating 20% to 50% more candidates than available positions. Provincial-level People's Congresses and the People's Liberation Army elect deputies from among the nominees. Campaigning is forbidden.¹⁸ Because China rejects the principle of the separation of powers, the heads of all the constitutional branches of government over which the NPC is meant to exercise oversight are themselves NPC deputies, including the President and the Premier of the State Council. In all, according to calculations by a leading Chinese media organization, 85% of the current NPC's nearly 3,000 deputies hold concurrent posts as Communist Party or state officials or civil servants.¹⁹ Holders of state, judicial, and procuratorial positions are barred, however, from serving on the NPC Standing Committee, the elite body that carries out the work of the NPC when the full NPC is out of session, as it is for all but approximately 10 days a year.

¹⁶ "China Stresses Party's Absolute Leadership over Army: Military Officer," *Xinhua News Agency*, July 29, 2012.

¹⁷ "Leaked Speech Shows Xi Jinping's Opposition to Reform," *China Digital Times*, January 27, 2013, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2013/01/leaked-speech-shows-xi-jinpings-opposition-to-reform/>.

¹⁸ Jiang Jinsong, *The National People's Congress of China* (Foreign Languages Press Beijing, 2003), pp. 86-104. Jiang notes on pp. 96-97 that, "The Election Act entitles national organizations and the provincial organizations of every political party and of every people's organization to nominate candidates of Deputies to the NPC. In addition, 10 or more Deputies of the incumbent NPC in each of the electoral units are also entitled to jointly nominate candidates to the NPC." That said, however, he writes that, "In reality all candidates to the NPC are nominated by the Communist Party in consultation with the other parties and the people's organizations at the national and provincial levels."

¹⁹ "南部社论 优化代表结构畅通民意表达" (Improve the Composition of Deputies: Clear the Way for Expression of Popular Opinion), *South Metropolitan News* editorial, March 10, 2012.

As a guarantee of Party control of the legislature, a member of the Party's seven-man Politburo Standing Committee serves concurrently as chairman of the NPC Standing Committee.

Proposals for political reform in China often involve empowering the NPC to play the role envisioned for it in the constitution. Proposals have focused, for example, on incentivizing the NPC to enforce the state constitution by creating a dedicated committee under the NPC Standing Committee to review laws passed nationwide for compliance with the constitution.²⁰ Others have suggested that the Party rule through the NPC, using only the NPC's powers as outlined in the constitution. If the Party were to do so, however, it would be significantly curbing its powers and, for the first time, submitting them to constitutional restraints.²¹

The Power of Provincial Governments

Provincial leaders are powerful players in the Chinese political system. Six of them, all Party Secretaries, sit on the Party's Politburo, making them among the 25 most powerful officials in the country. All provincial leaders share at least the same bureaucratic rank as central government ministers. With the 2011 inauguration of a U.S.-China Governors Forum, designed to bring together U.S. governors and Chinese provincial Party secretaries and governors, outreach to provincial leaders has become an important element of U.S. policy toward China.

²⁰ 李勇 (Li Yong), “建立有效可行的宪法实施监督机制,” (“Establish an Effective, Feasible Mechanism to Review Implementation of the Constitution”), 学习时报 (*Study Times*), January 21, 2013, http://www.studytimes.com.cn:9999/epaper/xxsb/html/2013/01/21/05/05_27.htm.

²¹ The Vice President of China's Supreme People's Court, Jiang Bixin, is closely associated with this proposal. Jiang argues that the NPC's relatively robust constitutionally mandated powers would be “sufficient for the Party to exercise effective control over administrative and judicial powers, and leadership over state power.” Jiang's stated rationale for proposing such an arrangement: that it would ease the tension between the Communist Party's current approach to ruling and the constitution's depiction of the NPC and local people's congresses as China's fundamental system of government. 江必新 (Jiang Bixin), “关于社会主义法制国家建设若干问题的理论思考” (“Theoretical Thinking on Certain Questions Related to Building a Socialist Country Ruled by Law”), 理论视野 (*Theoretical Horizon*), June 2012, p. 13. See also Jiang Bixin, “全面推进依法治国若干思考 以学习党的十八大报告为背景” (“Some Thoughts on Comprehensively Promoting the Rule of Law: Background to Studying the Party's 18th Congress Report”), 人民论坛杂志 (*People's Forum Magazine*), Issue 385, November 23, 2012.

Figure 2. Map of China
Showing Provincial-Level Administrative Divisions



Source: Esri Basemaps 2006. Map created by Hannah Fischer, CRS Information Research Specialist.

Levels of Administration²²

China has four levels of formal administration under the central government. The first level is officially made up of 34 provincial-level governments. This includes 23 provinces; five geographic entities that China calls “autonomous regions,” which have large ethnic minority populations (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang); four municipalities that report directly to the central government (Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Tianjin); and the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. The PRC’s count of 23 provinces includes Taiwan, the island of 23 million people that the PRC does not control, but over which it claims sovereignty.

The second level of administration includes more than 300 prefectural-level administrative units, including prefectures and prefectural-level cities. The third level of administration includes nearly 3,000 counties and county-level cities. The lowest tier of official administration is made up of approximately 40,000 townships and towns.

The first, third, and fourth levels of administration all have political structures that mirror the central government, with parallel Party and government organizations and people’s congresses. At the second administrative level, prefectural-level cities and autonomous prefectures also have government organizations and people’s congresses, but regular prefectures do not. Instead, they have administrative agencies.

Villages are not considered part of the formal administrative structure, but are rather considered “mass organizations of self-management at the grass-roots level.” Their status outside the government hierarchy allowed China to introduce direct elections at the village level in the 1980s without setting a precedent for direct elections at higher levels.

Fiscal decentralization has been a major force empowering provincial governments. Provinces have their own revenue streams, and governments at the provincial level and below are responsible for the lion's share of the country's public expenditure, including almost all public spending on education, health, unemployment insurance, social security, and welfare.²³ Provinces also have the right to pass their own laws and regulations, which may extend national laws and regulations, but not conflict with them. Beijing gives provinces considerable leeway in adopting policies to boost economic growth and encourages provinces to undertake approved policy experiments.

Beijing sometimes seems to struggle to impose its will on the provinces. Central government ministries have bureaus in the provinces, but they report both to their ministry in Beijing and to the provincial leadership. When priorities are in conflict, the leaders of such bureaus tend to put the provincial leadership's interests first, not least because the provincial leadership controls personnel assignments. China operates a unitary political system, not a federal system, however, and ultimately, Beijing has the upper hand. Provinces do not have their own constitutions and do not have the power to appoint their own leaders. The Party's Organization Department in Beijing manages the appointments and promotions of all provincial Party Secretaries and governors, and routinely moves those provincial leaders from province to province, and in and out of posts in Beijing, to ensure that they do not build up regional powerbases. For the same reason, the Party also ensures that military region boundaries do not overlap with provincial boundaries. Beijing's leverage over the provinces includes its ability to send the Party's Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission into provinces to investigate corruption allegations, and to send the General Auditor's Office into provinces to check their books.²⁴

Document-Based Culture

In the Chinese system, the statements of individual leaders are almost always less authoritative than documents approved by the collective leadership, with the most authoritative documents being those approved by the Communist Party Central Committee. A corollary is that the officially sanctioned published form of a leader's words is almost always more authoritative than the words as originally delivered, with the act of publication providing an important stamp of party approval. Notably, former Premier Wen Jiabao used interviews with the foreign media to discuss his ideas for political reform, but the Chinese state media never reported the substance of those interviews, limiting their authority and impact in China.²⁵

China's document-based culture also includes a heavy reliance on paper documents, even in a digital age, with the circulation of paper documents, and the accumulation of signatures on them, helping to build consensus. In the U.S.-China relationship, the great store China places in documents helps explain why the Chinese side has pushed so hard for the issuance of a series of detailed joint statements between the two countries. The Chinese side considers these to be highly authoritative texts containing guiding principles for the relationship, although U.S. officials generally do not accord them similar importance, a disconnect that creates a potentially dangerous expectation gap.

²² For a detailed discussion of China's administrative divisions, see Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 179-81.

²³ Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 200.

²⁴ Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 186-187.

²⁵ For discussion of Wen's calls for political reform, see Alice Miller, "Splits in the Politburo Leadership?," and Joseph Fewsmith, "Political Reform Was Never on the Agenda," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 34 (February 22, 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67996>.

The Importance of Ideology

Ideology matters more in China than in many other political systems. As the Chinese Communist Party has sought to adapt itself to a changing world, it has had to wrestle with ways to revise its ruling ideology to allow the change necessary for its survival, without changing its ideology so much as to undermine further its already tenuous justifications for maintaining a permanent monopoly on power. The CCP waged a successful revolution and established the People's Republic of China with the promise that it would help farmers and workers overthrow their "exploiters," the landlords and capitalists, and establish socialism and ultimately communism, in which all property would be publicly owned, and all classes would cease to exist.²⁶ In its constitution, the Party still officially proclaims the "realization of communism" to be its "highest ideal and ultimate goal."

As a ruling party, rather than a revolutionary party, however, the CCP now defines itself as representing "the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people,"²⁷ including capitalists. In 2007, long after privately owned businesses began driving double digit economic growth rates in its coastal provinces, and long after its real estate markets began to boom, China finally passed a law protecting private property rights. Each time the Party edges further away from its Marxist roots, even if only to catch up with reality on the ground, it faces howls of protest from China's marginalized but still vocal Marxists. China's preferential treatment of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), a point of friction in U.S.-China relations, is caught up in this ideological debate. The Preamble to CCP's constitution today still holds that, "The Party must uphold and improve the basic economic system, with public ownership playing a dominant role."²⁸

The Ideal and Reality of Meritocracy

An important element of the Communist Party's bid for ideologically based legitimacy is the notion that people rise within the Party or State hierarchy based on what the Party constitution describes as "their moral integrity and their professional competence," and "on their merits without regard to their origins."²⁹ The Party, which manages personnel appointments across the Chinese political system, the military, and all public institutions, argues that this arrangement helps make China's political system superior to the political systems of countries that elect their leaders in competitive, multi-party elections. The degree to which China really does operate a meritocracy is a subject of debate, however. A detailed 2012 study conducted by scholars in the United States and China found no evidence of a correlation between rank in the Communist Party hierarchy and success in delivering "exceptional economic growth"—a strong indicator of professional competence. The authors did, however, find that the Party awarded promotions based on factional ties, familial ties to senior leaders, and educational qualifications.³⁰ The children of high-level officials, dubbed "princelings" (*taizi*) in colloquial Chinese, are particularly prominent

²⁶ For discussion of the role of ideology in Chinese politics, see William A. Joseph, "Ideology and Chinese Politics," in *Politics in China: An Introduction*, ed. William A. Joseph (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 129-164.

²⁷ Full Text of Constitution of Communist Party of China (as amended on November 14, 2012), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/25/content_6944738.htm.

²⁸ Ibid. The Preamble is also sometimes known as the "General Program."

²⁹ Ibid, Article 33.

³⁰ Victor Shih, Christopher Adolph, Mingxing Liu, "Getting Ahead in the Communist Party: Explaining the Advancement of Central Committee Members in China," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (February 2012), pp. 166-187.

at the highest levels of the Chinese political system, with four of the seven members of the current Politburo Standing Committee meeting that description. China's most prominent princeling is Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, the son of revered early revolutionary Xi Zhongxun.³¹ Meanwhile, corruption and sex scandals have undermined the Party's claim to appoint leaders with "moral integrity." China has also seen a rise in the practice of the buying and selling of public office, in which officials illegally auction off posts.

Age and Term Limits for Official Positions

Although a relatively recent innovation, introduced beginning in 1997, enforcement of age and term limits for top Party and State positions has brought a degree of predictability into otherwise opaque Chinese elite politics. At the last three quinquennial Party Congresses, in 2002, 2007, and 2012, no one older than 67 was appointed or reappointed to the Politburo Standing Committee or the broader Politburo. In 2012, the Party extended that age limit to all members of the Central Military Commission. Unless they serve concurrently on higher bodies, ministers, provincial Party Secretaries, and governors cannot be older than 62 when appointed to new terms, and have a retirement age of 65, although those in the middle of their terms are often permitted to stay on a little longer.³² Meanwhile, all top officials are limited to two five-year terms in the same posts. Those age and term limits define the number of positions that will turn over at each Party Congress and limit the pool of possible candidates. Age limits mean that five of the seven members of the current Politburo Standing Committee are expected to serve only one five-year term; only Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are young enough to serve a second term. By virtue of their age, the two youngest members of the newly appointed 25-member Politburo have emerged as possible future national leaders in waiting. They are Hu Chunhua, the Party Secretary of Guangdong Province, and Sun Zhengcai, the Party Secretary of provincial-level Chongqing Municipality, both aged 49.

Penchant for Long-Term Planning

As a legacy of the centrally planned economic system of the 1950s and 1960s, the Chinese political system places a heavy emphasis on long-term planning. At five-year intervals, the Communist Party General Secretary presents a report to the Party Congress outlining the Party's priorities for the country. It is one of the most authoritative documents in the Chinese political system. China also prepares "Five-Year Plans" that set economic, demographic, and social targets and identify priority industries for development. Other official plans lay out roadmaps for development in various fields over longer time-frames. A roadmap for scientific development, for example, covers the period through 2050.³³ Such plans are not followed to the letter, but they have a powerful role in guiding official policy.

The Communist Party has also tried to apply a long-term planning approach to grooming future political leaders. The most prominent example of an official groomed for high office over a

³¹ Other princelings in the Politburo Standing Committee are Zhang Dejiang, son of former PLA Major General Zhang Zhiyi; Yu Zhengsheng, son of Huang Jing (Yu Qiwei), the first husband of Madame Mao Zedong and an early Party Secretary of the city of Tianjin; and Wang Qishan, son-in-law of former Politburo Standing Committee member and Vice Premier Yao Yilin. Cheng Li, *China's Top Future Leaders to Watch*, Brookings Institution, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/china/top-future-leaders>.

³² For information about these age restrictions and how top Party officials are selected, see Alice Miller, "The Road to the 18th Party Congress," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 36 (January 6, 2012), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/104231>.

³³ The science plan, issued by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2009, is entitled, "Innovation 2050: The Science and Technology Revolution and China's Future" (创新2050: 科技革命于中国的未来).

lengthy period is former Party General Secretary Hu Jintao, who was appointed to China's top decision-making body as heir apparent to then General Secretary Jiang Zemin in 1992, a full decade before he finally ascended to the top job, which he held for another decade. China's current top two Party leaders, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, had shorter, five-year-long apprenticeships.

Emphasis on Political Stability

In 1989, China's Communist Party faced the challenge of large-scale protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and in more than 100 other cities around the country. Disagreements about how to respond split the top Party leadership and forced out the Party General Secretary at the time, Zhao Ziyang. As noted earlier, the decision by Deng Xiaoping, then China's supreme leader, to order in the army to clear the Beijing protesters by force undermined the Party's legitimacy and severely damaged China's standing in the world. Since then, the Party has made maintenance of social stability one of its top priorities, deploying a vast internal security apparatus to head off protests or, once they erupt, to prevent them from spreading.

The domestic security apparatus includes an 800,000-strong police force under the Ministry of Public Security and a 1.5 million-strong paramilitary force, the People's Armed Police, which reports to both the Party's Central Military Commission and, through the Ministry of Public Security, to the State Council. The 2.25 million-strong People's Liberation Army also has a domestic stability mandate, on top of its national defense mandate. Other agencies involved in internal security include the Party's Propaganda Department, which plays an important role in censoring the media to prevent discussion of subjects that might feed movements for change; the Ministry of State Security, which focuses on internal security threats as well as conducting intelligence-gathering abroad; and the Ministry of Justice, which operates China's prison system.³⁴ All but the Propaganda Department are overseen by the Party's Central Commission of Politics and Law and all are powerful bureaucratic players in the Chinese political system, although as of November 2012, the head of the Commission now sits at the Politburo level, alongside the head of the Propaganda Department, rather than at the level of the more senior Politburo Standing Committee. Since 2010, China's spending on such internal security agencies as the police, the People's Armed Police, the courts, and the prison system has outstripped its spending on the military. The 2013 national budget contained planned spending of \$123.7 billion on internal security (not including the PLA), compared to \$119 billion on defense.³⁵

Governance Challenges in the Chinese Political System

Since 1978, the CCP has worked to build, almost entirely from scratch, a set of governing institutions and a system of laws capable of handling rapid economic and social development at home and ever more complex interactions with the global community. The Communist Party's insistence on the principle of unchallenged Communist Party rule atop this system has been one of the few constants in the process. China has carried out seven sweeping re-organizations of government in the last 30 years, establishing new agencies and coordinating committees, spinning

³⁴ For an overview of the internal security apparatus, see Richard D. Fisher, Jr., *China's Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach* (Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 32-34.

³⁵ Henry Sanderson and Michael Forsythe, "China Boosts Defense Spending as Military Modernizes Arsenal," *Bloomberg News*, March 5, 2013.

off of the old “line” ministries, merging other ministries, and adjusting the bureaucratic status and/or jurisdiction of many government bodies. Keeping track of the changes adds to the challenge of understanding China’s policy process. These institutional reforms have not, however, managed to solve some enduring challenges in the Chinese system undermining effective governance.

“Stove-Piping” and Bureaucratic Competition

Among the Chinese political system’s governance difficulties is the phenomenon known as “stove-piping,” in which individual ministries and other hierarchies share information up and down the chain of command, but not horizontally with each other. China has no coordinating body analogous to the U.S. National Security Council. “Leading Small Groups” at the top of the Party and the State seek to bring together representatives from multiple agencies to coordinate and build consensus around policy in specific areas, but they have small staffs, vary widely in their level of activity, and are usually unwilling to get involved in forcing day-to-day coordination among their member agencies. In the U.S.-China relationship, one of the values U.S. officials see in the Strategic & Economic Dialogue (S&ED) mechanism is that it forces multiple Chinese agencies to come together under one roof to talk with the U.S. government about issues in the relationship, and, as a side benefit, to talk to each other.

A related governance issue is unproductive competition among official entities. It is not uncommon in China for multiple entities to attempt to assert jurisdiction over the same issue, competing with each other for scarce budget resources, power, and recognition from higher government officials. A government restructuring carried out in March 2013 attempted to address some of the most glaring cases of overlapping jurisdiction, disbanding the country’s National Population and Family Planning Commission and merging its family planning divisions into the Ministry of Health, for example, and combining multiple competing maritime law enforcement agencies under a single organization, the State Oceanic Administration. In the latter case, however, bureaucratic competition may still be a problem because while the State Oceanic Administration reports to the Ministry of Land and Resources, operational control of the Administration’s maritime law enforcement forces was assigned to the Ministry of Public Security.³⁶

The Distorting Influence of Bureaucratic Rank

Chinese political culture features carefully observed systems of ranks that identify the relative importance of people, official agencies, public institutions, state-owned corporations, and geographic units. Rank consciousness affects the way that officials and their agencies interact with each other. Most damagingly, it contributes to the political system’s difficulty in achieving successful inter-agency coordination and frequently undermines lines of authority.

Among the rules that govern rank in China is that entities of equivalent rank cannot issue binding orders to each other. Often, they cannot even compel coordination, although Party entities and security agencies have more clout in that respect than other entities. An entity of lesser rank seeking to coordinate with an entity of higher rank faces a daunting challenge. Many analysts attribute the well documented communication problems between the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Foreign Ministry to the large gap in their respective ranks. The PLA’s Central

³⁶ “China to Restructure Oceanic Administration, Enhance Maritime Law Enforcement,” *Xinhua News Agency*, March 10, 2013.

Military Commission is of equivalent rank to the State Council, China's cabinet, while the Foreign Ministry is a mere ministry under the State Council. For the Foreign Ministry to liaise with the PLA, it must report up to the State Council, which may have to report up further up to the Politburo in order to secure PLA cooperation.³⁷

In another example of the distorting influence of rank, state-owned enterprises sometimes outrank the Party and state leaders in the geographic jurisdictions in which they are based, making it impossible for the local government to issue binding orders to them.³⁸ The rank system can also impede effective regulatory oversight when regulators share the same bureaucratic rank as entities they are charged with regulating. For example, while China's banking regulator, the China Banking Regulatory Commission (CBRC), has ministerial rank, and China's five largest banks have quasi-ministerial rank, at the province level they have equal rank, resulting in resistance from the banks' provincial branches to the provincial CBRC's oversight.³⁹

One solution periodically proposed for some of these rank-related governance issues is to abolish administrative ranks for the leaders of state-owned enterprises, financial institutions, and universities. In 2000, a central government commission issued trial "basic norms" requiring large and medium-sized state-owned enterprises to give up administrative rank, but so far only the cities of Shanghai and Guangzhou have shown any interest in implementing it.⁴⁰ One reason for the slow pace of reform may be the unwillingness of corporate and educational leaders to give up the array of privileges that accompany administrative rank. According to a 2012 article in China's respected *Southern Weekend* newspaper, officials with the rank of full ministers are assigned a car costing up to \$71,000, with a full-time driver; provided state funds for the purchase of residences up to 2,400 square feet in size; and given access to exclusive health care, including single-person VIP hospital rooms and the convenience of having all medical bills automatically settled by the Ministry of Health. All those privileges continue for life, with health privileges being the most prized. Retired full minister-rank officials are also assigned a full-time secretary for life.⁴¹

A long-time challenge for the U.S.-China relationship has been that China considers U.S. Cabinet Secretaries to be of equivalent rank to Chinese ministers, rather than to China's more senior vice premiers and state councilors. The creation of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) allowed the United States to bypass the rank system and find a way for the U.S. Secretaries of the Treasury and State to deal directly with their real counterparts above the ministerial level. The U.S. Secretary of Defense, however, is still hosted by the Chinese Minister

³⁷ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace scholar Michael Swaine reports that within the PLA, rank differences can impede coordination between the units in charge of operations and training, which are more senior in the PLA hierarchy, and those in charge of foreign affairs and intelligence, which are more junior, even when training exercises have foreign policy implications. Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior Part Three: The Role of the Military in Foreign Policy," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 36 (January 6, 2012), p. 9, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/104181>.

³⁸ The Brookings Institution's Kenneth Lieberthal makes this point as part of an insightful discussion of the role of rank in the Chinese political system in Kenneth Lieberthal, *Managing the China Challenge: How to Achieve Corporate Success in the People's Republic* (Brookings Institution Press, 2011), pp. 50-52.

³⁹ "全国金融工作会议将讨论改革金融企业行政级别" ("National Financial Work Meeting Will Discuss Reform of Administrative Ranks for Financial Institutions"), *21世纪经济报道* (*21st Century Business Herald*), December 5, 2006. <http://finance.people.com.cn/GB/1040/5124620.html>. The five banks in question are ICBC, Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of China, China Construction Bank, and Bank of Communications.

⁴⁰ Wu Jie, "副部长级央企再增四家," ("Four More Quasi-Ministerial Rank Central Enterprises Added"), *Southern Weekend*, March 20, 2012, <http://www.infzm.com/content/73097>.

⁴¹ Qian Haoping, "中国有多少部级单位" ("How Many 'Ministerial-Level' Units Does China Have?"), *南方周末* (*Southern Weekend*), February 16, 2012.

of Defense, who is the third most senior uniformed member of the Central Military Commission and is outside the operational chain of command.

Table 2. Select Chinese Institutions and Their Bureaucratic Ranks

Rank	Institutions
Full State (正国级)	Communist Party Central Committee; Party and State Central Military Commissions; The State Council; National People's Congress Standing Committee; Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee; State Presidency
Quasi State (副国级)	Communist Party Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission (the Party's graft-fighting arm); Supreme People's Court; Supreme People's Procuratorate (the public prosecutor's office)
Ministry/Province (正部省级)	Party departments (e.g. Party Organization Department, Party Propaganda Department); ministries, commissions, and general administrations; regulatory commissions (e.g., for banking, insurance, and securities); provinces and autonomous regions; municipalities under the central government (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing); Hong Kong and Macau; "mass organizations" such as the Communist Youth League and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions; the Xinhua News Agency; research academies (the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Chinese Academy of Engineering)
Quasi Ministry/Province Rank (副部省级)	State bureaus, offices, and administrations (e.g., State Statistical Bureau, State Intellectual Property Office, State Oceanic Administration, and State Food and Drug Administration); 15 cities (Changchun, Chengdu, Dalian, Hangzhou, Harbin, Guangzhou, Ji'nan, Nanjing, Ningbo, Qingdao, Shenyang, Shenzhen, Wuhan, Xiamen, and Xi'an); China's five largest banks and four largest insurance companies; dozens of large state enterprises (e.g., the China National Tobacco Corporation); 32 universities

Source: Chinese media reports.

Weak Rule of Law

A long-standing source of frustration for U.S. government officials is the seeming inability or unwillingness of their Chinese counterparts to enforce policies, decisions, regulations, and laws, much less the state constitution. Scholars of China have identified many factors that contribute to this situation. A fundamental one is considered to be the Chinese Communist Party's attitude toward the law. The Party is widely perceived to support rule *by* law—law as a tool for governance—but not rule *of* law. The Party is particularly unwilling to submit itself to legal restraints. As noted earlier, although the Party is China's dominant political institution, with its leadership mentioned five times in the preamble to the state constitution, the Party and its bureaucracy are not mentioned in any of the articles of the constitution, leaving an unclear legal basis for the Party's powers. The Party holds itself above the law when it insists that judicial authorities cannot investigate Party members without the Party's consent. In the case of a Party official accused of wrongdoing, such as the former Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai, for example, the Party conducts its own investigation and then chooses whether to hand the accused over to the state judiciary.⁴² The Party also explicitly denies the judiciary independence, insisting that Party Commissions of Politics and Law oversee the work of the police, the prosecutor's office, and the courts. The commissions are empowered to intervene to obtain outcomes in the

⁴² Bo was expelled from the Communist Party in September 2012. The Party announced in January 2013 that he had been handed over to the judicial authorities. No trial date has yet been set.

Party's interest, undermining the authority of the law. In a 2012 article, the Vice President of China's Supreme Court rued the fact that for officials across China, economic development is "the first imperative," and preserving stability is "the first responsibility," whereas ruling lawfully is a "second or third" tier consideration.⁴³ Civil society groups have long lobbied for a greater role in monitoring enforcement of rules and regulations, but the CCP continues to resist, fearing empowering groups outside its control.

Factionalism

Although China is effectively a one party state, multiple coalitions, factions, and constituencies exist within the political system. Political mentorship, place of birth, the affiliations of one's parents, and common educational or work history may lead individuals to form political alliances. Former Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin, for example, was known for promoting and relying upon a group of officials he had known from his days as Mayor and then Party Secretary of Shanghai, who also shared his interest in fast-paced economic growth and breaking down ideological barriers to the growth of the private sector. Jiang emerged from retirement before the Communist Party's 18th National Congress in November 2012 and is reported to have played an outsized role in placing factional allies on the new Politburo Standing Committee that emerged from the Congress. Former Party General Secretary Hu Jintao, for his part, promoted a number of officials who, like him, worked for the Communist Youth League. Increasingly, scholars see competition within the party and the state based on bureaucratic constituencies, too. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology backs industry, for example, against the Ministry of Environment, which seeks to rein in industrial pollution.

⁴³ 江必新(Jiang Bixin), "关于社会主义法制国家建设若干问题的理论思考" ("Theoretical Thinking on Certain Questions Related to Building a Socialist Country Ruled by Law"), 理论视野(Theoretical Horizon), June 2012, p. 12.

The Bo Xilai Affair

On April 10, 2012, the Communist Party suspended one of its top leaders, Bo Xilai, from his posts on the Party's Politburo and Central Committee, and announced that the Party's graft-fighting arm, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission, would be investigating him for alleged "serious discipline violations." The Party had removed Bo from his post as Party Secretary of powerful Chongqing Municipality just weeks earlier, on March 15. Also on April 10, China's official Xinhua News Agency announced that Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, had been handed over to state judicial authorities on suspicion of involvement in the November 2011 murder in Chongqing of a British businessman. The authorities indicated that the investigation into the alleged murder was spurred by information provided by Bo's former police chief and vice mayor in Chongqing, Wang Lijun, who sparked headlines around the world when he sought refuge in the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu for approximately 30 hours on February 6 and 7, 2012, before giving himself up to Chinese security officials.

Coming ahead of a sweeping generational leadership transition at the 18th Party Congress, Bo's ouster up-ended the Party's effort to present the transition as smooth and uneventful. Bo's fall raised questions about the unity of the Party's remaining top leadership and the loyalty of segments of the military to the Party. As details of the Bo family's wealth emerged, it also highlighted the degree to which the families of top Party officials have been able to parlay access to political power into vast personal wealth, information that risks further harming the Party's already fragile legitimacy. Finally, with the role micro-bloggers played in moving events in the Bo saga forward, the Bo affair highlighted the challenge the Communist Party faces in controlling information and narratives in a social media age.

Bo's vice mayor appears to have sealed Bo's fate when he took his allegations against his boss to U.S. diplomats, thus ensuring that the allegations could not be contained. Until then, Bo appeared to be riding high. Media-savvy and relishing the limelight, he had drawn national attention by styling himself as a champion of the poor and dispossessed, throwing his support behind the state-owned economy, leading a brutal crackdown on alleged organized crime bosses, and fanning nostalgia for the more egalitarian ethos of the Mao Zedong era, including by encouraging the mass singing of "red" songs from the chaotic and violent Cultural Revolution movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Bo's egalitarian rhetoric was implicitly critical of Party General Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao's failure to narrow one of the world's starkest wealth gaps. His supporters included those uncomfortable with the ideological compromises and broken promises to the working class that have accompanied China's rise to become the world's second-largest economy. Riding his notoriety, Bo was widely reported to be angling for promotion to the Party's top decision-making body, the Politburo Standing Committee.

Bo's wife was convicted of murder in August 2012. Bo's vice mayor was convicted of "bending the law for selfish ends, defection, abuse of power and bribe-taking" in September 2012.⁴⁴ Days later, the Party Politburo expelled Bo from the Party's ranks and announced that it was transferring his case to state judicial authorities. The Party investigation concluded that Bo "bore major responsibility" in the cases of his vice-mayor's flight to the U.S. consulate and his wife's involvement in the murder, and alleged that he "took advantage of his office to seek profits for others and received huge bribes personally and through his family."⁴⁵ The new collective Party leadership now faces the same challenge that faced their predecessors: convincing Bo's supporters that the allegations against Bo and his wife are genuine, and not a pretext for disposing of a political and ideological challenger. With the 18th Party Congress behind them, however, the stakes are now lower. The next stage in the saga will be Bo's trial. No date has yet been set.

Corruption

Corruption in China is widespread. Among its forms are lavish gifts and expensive meals bestowed on officials by those seeking favors; bribes explicitly provided in exchange for permits, approvals, and jobs; privileged opportunities offered to officials or their extended families to acquire corporate shares, stock, and real estate; embezzlement of state funds; and exemption of friends, relatives, and business associates from enforcement of laws and regulations. As China's economy has expanded over the last 30 years, the scale of corruption has grown dramatically. A

⁴⁴ "Wang Lijun Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison," Xinhua News Agency, September 24, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/24/c_131868689.htm.

⁴⁵ "Bo Xilai Expelled from CPC, Public Office," Xinhua News Agency, September 28, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/28/c_131880079.htm.

2011 report released by China's central bank estimated that from the mid-1990s to 2008, corrupt officials who fled overseas took with them \$120 billion in stolen funds.⁴⁶ Estimates of illicit financial flows out of China are many times higher. In a 2012 report, Global Financial Integrity, a Washington, DC-based research and advocacy organization, estimated that total illicit financial flows out of China in the decade from 2001 through 2010 amounted to \$2.74 trillion, with \$420 billion leaving China illicitly in 2010 alone.⁴⁷ The international non-governmental organization Transparency International ranks China 80th on its Corruption Perceptions Index, with the top ranking countries being the least corrupt. China ranks just below Sri Lanka and above Serbia. The United States is ranked 19th.⁴⁸

Immediately following his appointment as Communist Party General Secretary in November 2012, Xi Jinping identified corruption and graft within the Party as "pressing problems." He pledged to "work with all comrades in the party, to make sure the party supervises its own conduct and enforces strict discipline."⁴⁹ Many observers believe, however, that the Party's insistence on supervising its own conduct, rather than accepting supervision from outside, has been part of the reason that corruption has flourished. Critics charge, moreover, that when the Party's corruption-fighting agency, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission, conducts investigations, they are frequently politically motivated, even if they uncover real wrongdoing. Officials who keep on the right side of their superiors and colleagues may engage in large-scale corruption, while other officials may be investigated for lesser infractions because they have fallen afoul of powerful officials.

Media commentators and academics have suggested a variety of measures to tackle corruption, including allowing the media to play more of a watchdog role and requiring officials to make their family assets public. So far, neither proposal has advanced significantly. Journalists who expose wrongdoing do so at their peril. In recent years, however, microbloggers have successfully exposed a string of corrupt officials. In one high-profile case, microbloggers drew attention to photographs of a local official showing him wearing at least 11 different luxury wristwatches on various occasions. Just one of the timepieces was worth more than twice the man's annual salary.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ "Chinese Officials Stole \$120 Billion, Fled Mainly to US," *BBC News*, June 17, 2011.

⁴⁷ "New Report Finds Crime, Corruption, and Tax Evasion at Near-Historic Highs in 2010," Global Financial Integrity (a program of the Center for International Policy), December 17, 2012, <http://www.gfintegrity.org/content/view/592/70/>.

⁴⁸ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2012*, December 5, 2012, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>.

⁴⁹ "Xi Jinping's first public address," CNN.com, November 15, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/15/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-speech/index.html>. Xi's personal credentials for corruption-fighting came under question even before his appointment as Party leader, when Bloomberg News reported that members of his extended family had accumulated hundreds of millions of dollars in assets in such sectors as minerals, real estate, and mobile-phone equipment. Bloomberg did not trace any assets to Xi personally, however, or to his wife or daughter. Michael Forsythe, Shai Oster, Natasha Khan, and Dune Lawrence, "Xi Jinping Millionaire Relations Reveal Fortunes of Elite," *Bloomberg*, June 29, 2012.

⁵⁰ Wang Yong, "A fancy watch is corruption tipoff," *Shanghai Daily*, September 20, 2012.

China's Political Institutions in Detail

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

The Communist Party's 82.6 million members constitute approximately 6% of China's population of 1.34 billion. Any Chinese citizen over the age of 18 who is willing to accept and abide by the Party's constitution and policies, which include a requirement that Party members be atheists, can apply for Party membership. In 2011, however, of 21.6 million applicants, fewer than 15% were accepted. The Party is heavily male, with female members making up less than a quarter of the total. Nearly 85% of members work for the Party or the State.⁵¹ Party membership is considered prestigious, although not to the degree that it was in earlier eras.

Every Party member, irrespective of position, is required to be organized into a branch, cell, or other specific unit of the Party to participate in the regular activities of the Party organization. Party units exist in all official and semi-official organizations and institutions, including state-owned enterprises and universities. As of the end of 2011, they also existed in nearly 1 million private businesses and foreign-owned enterprises and in nearly every officially registered civil society organization.⁵² These Party bodies can wield great power within an institution, even though in some cases, as in foreign-owned companies, they may have little formal authority. With the Party controlling all avenues for public sector advancement, it is thought that many young people join the Party for career reasons.

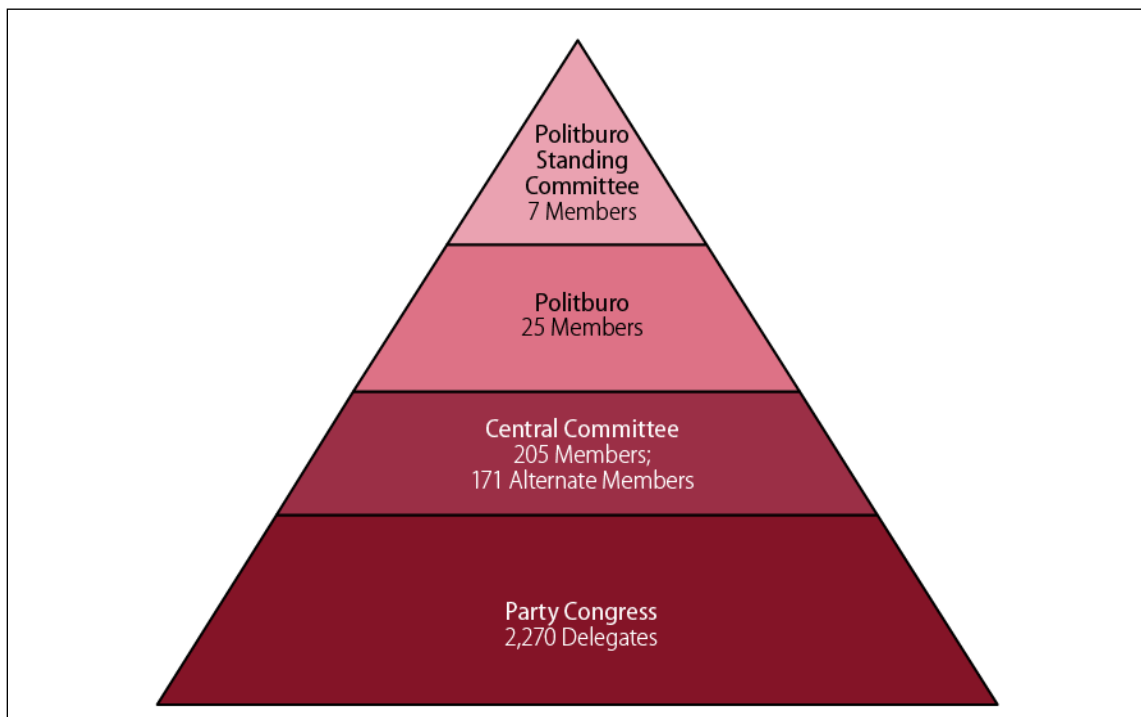
Party policy is communicated down the layers of the Party organization by means of directives and Party committee meetings. The Party also ensures ideological conformity through nationwide study campaigns. In September 2008, for example, the Party launched an 18-month-long campaign for Party members to study Communist Party General Secretary Hu Jintao's "scientific concept of development." Party members throughout the system were required to study speeches and documents related to the concept. Party publishing houses published study guides. In another example, in 2009, as part of a broader study campaign on "the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics," the Party's Propaganda Department ordered Party organizations nationwide to lead study sessions on a set of concepts known as the "Six Why's." Among the six why's were why separation of powers and a Western-style multi-party system were not right for China.⁵³

⁵¹ "China Communist Party members exceed 82 mln," *Xinhua News Agency*, June 30, 2012; "中组部全国党员8260.2万名 基层党组织402.7万个," ("Central Organization Department: 82.602 million Party members nationwide, 4.027 million grassroots Party organizations," *Xinhua News Agency*, July 1, 2012.

⁵² "中组部 全国党员8260.2万名 基层党组织402.7万个," ("Central Organization Department: 82.602 Million Party Members Nationwide, 4.027 Million Grassroots Party Organizations," *Xinhua News Agency*, July 1, 2012.

⁵³ Theory Bureau, CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department, *Six "Why's": Answers to Some Important Questions (六个为什么: 对几个重大问题的回答)* (Study Press 学习出版社, 2009).

Figure 3. The National-Level Communist Party Hierarchy
 The Politburo Standing Committee is the Most Powerful Decision-Making Body



Source: 中共中央组织结构图 (Organizational Structure Chart of the Communist Party Central Committee), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/351757/index.html>.

Party Leadership Bodies

At the top of the Party's hierarchy, the most powerful policy- and decision-making entity is the **Politburo Standing Committee (PSC)**, currently comprised of seven men. They are all members of the broader **Politburo**, which has a membership of 25. The PSC and the Politburo are supported by the seven-man **Party Secretariat**. Politburo members are all members of the broadest senior grouping of Communist Party officials, the **Central Committee**, which has 205 full members and 171 alternate members (see **Figure 3** for an illustration of the Party hierarchy).

As noted above, each member of the PSC has a rank, from one to seven, and is responsible for a specific portfolio. (See "Collective Leadership.") To ensure Party control, the top-ranked members of the PSC serve concurrently as the heads of other parts of the political system. The top ranked PSC member, Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, for example, serves concurrently as Chairman of the **Central Military Commission**, and as State President. The second-, third-, and fourth-ranked PSC members serve respectively as State Premier and as heads of the NPC and the CPPCC.

PSC members also head Party "**Leading Small Groups**" (LSGs) for their policy areas. LSGs are secretive bodies intended to facilitate cross-agency coordination in implementation of Politburo Standing Committee decisions. The National Security Leading Small Group and the Foreign

Affairs Leading Small Group, for example, were both headed by Hu Jintao when he was Communist Party General Secretary, and are believed to be headed by Xi Jinping now.⁵⁴

The next highest decision-making body is the full **Politburo**. **Table 3** breaks down the 25 members into several categories. The current Politburo has only two female members, State Councilor Liu Yandong and Tianjin Party Secretary Sun Chunlan. Because of its relatively unwieldy size and the geographic diversity of its members, the full Politburo is not involved in day-to-day decision-making. In 2012, it is reported to have met eight times, with its meetings often focused on a single major policy area or on preparations for major national meetings.⁵⁵

Table 3. The 18th Central Committee's Politburo (Political Bureau)

Appointed at the first plenum of the 18th Central Committee, November 2012

Category	Politburo Members
Politburo Standing Committee Members (7)	Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Liu Yunshan, Wang Qishan, Zhang Gaoli
Provincial Party Secretaries (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guo Jinlong (Beijing) • Han Zheng (Shanghai) • Hu Chunhua (Guangdong) • Sun Chunlan (Tianjin) • Sun Zhengcai (Chongqing) • Zhang Chunxian (Xinjiang)
Military Officers (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen. Fan Chenglong, Vice Chairman, Party Central Military Commission • Gen. Xu Qiliang, Vice Chairman, Party Central Military Commission.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the PSC under Xi Jinping's predecessor, Hu Jintao, see Alice L. Miller, "The Politburo Standing Committee under Hu Jintao," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35 (September 21, 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/93646>. For a discussion of the history of Leading Small Groups and their current role, see Alice L. Miller, "The CCP Central Committee's Leading Small Groups," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 26 (September 2, 2008), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/5689>.

⁵⁵ The website of the Party Central Committee's mouthpiece, the People's Daily, contains a list of Politburo meetings and their agendas going back to 2002. For meetings of the current Politburo see <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/1119/c352110-19621695.html>. The annual lists are not always complete, however. In reporting the Party's decision to expel Bo Xilai from the Party, for example, the Xinhua News Agency reported the Politburo had met on April 10, 2012, for a briefing on the investigation into actions by Bo's former police chief and Bo's wife. Yet that April 10, 2012, meeting is missing from the official list of Politburo meetings. "Bo Xilai Expelled from CPC, Public Office," Xinhua News Agency, September 28, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/28/c_131880079.htm.

Category	Politburo Members
Heads of Communist Party Central Committee Departments, Commissions, and Offices (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Li Zhanshu, Member of Party Secretariat; Director of Central Committee General Office; Party Secretary of Working Committee of the Organs Directly Under the Central Committee • Liu Qibao, Member of Party Secretariat; Head of Central Committee Propaganda Department • Meng Jianzhu, Head of Central Commission of Politics and Law • Wang Huning, Director, Central Committee Policy Research Office • Zhao Leji, Member of Party Secretariat; Head of Central Committee Organization Department
State Officials (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Li Yuanchao, State Vice President • Liu Yandong, Vice Premier • Wang Yang, Vice Premier • Ma Kai, Vice Premier; Party Secretary of Central State Organs Work Committee; President, Chinese Academy of Governance
National People's Congress Official (1)	Li Jianguo , Vice Chairman, NPC Standing Committee; Chairman, All-China Trade Unions

Source: Xinhua News Agency biographies.

Notes: All members born before 1950 are expected to retire at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. Five of the seven Politburo Standing Committee members and 6 of the 18 regular members of the Politburo were born before 1950.

Although the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee are ranked, from one to seven, regular Politburo members are of equal rank and are listed here alphabetically.

According to the Party's constitution, the PSC and Politburo derive their power from the **Central Committee**, whose full and alternate members together "elect" the Politburo, Politburo Standing Committee, and Party General Secretary, and "decide" on the composition of the Party's Central Military Commission.⁵⁶ In practice, incumbent top officials provide a list of nominees to the Central Committee, which ratifies it.⁵⁷ The 17th Central Committee (including alternates), whose term concluded in November 2012, was made up of leaders from the provinces (41.5%), central ministries (22.6%), the military (17.5 %), central Party organizations (5.9%), and state-owned enterprises, educational institutions, "mass organizations" such as the Communist Youth League, and other constituencies (12.4%).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The Party's constitution, which was most recently revised in 2007, is available in English at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/25/content_6944738.htm and in Chinese at http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-11/18/content_633225.htm.

⁵⁷ In 2007, the process for development of the nominees list was modestly more inclusive than previously. The Party leadership drew up a list of nearly 200 candidates for nominations and then invited all full and alternate members of the Central Committee and other unidentified Party figures to vote upon them. The Party leadership reportedly drew upon the results of this straw poll in developing its final list of 25 Politburo nominees for Central Committee ratification, although it was not bound by the straw poll's results. Alice Miller, "The Road to the 18th Party Congress," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 36 (January 6, 2012), p. 9, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/104231>.

⁵⁸ Cheng Li, "A Pivotal Stepping-Stone: Local Leaders' Representation on the 17th Central Committee," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 23 (January 23, 2008), p. 1, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/5772>.

The Central Committee, in turn, is elected by the approximately 2,000 delegates to **Party National Congresses**, which are held every five years. Congress delegates also approve the Party General Secretary's report to the Congress, which serves as a statement of the Party's positions and an outline of the Party's agenda for the coming five years.

In the years between Party Congresses, the Central Committee is required to meet at least once a year, with each meeting known as a *plenum* (or *plenary session*). Plenums usually focus on setting the direction for the country in a specific area, while also approving major personnel decisions. In October 2010, for example, the Fifth Plenum of the 17th Central Committee discussed and approved a draft of the 12th Five-Year Plan for China's economy, covering the years 2011 to 2015. It also approved the appointment of Xi Jinping to be first vice chairman of the CMC, a move widely seen as the last step in Xi's preparation to become the top ranked official in the Communist Party in 2012. At the end of each plenum, the Party issues a public document, known as a *communiqué*, announcing the major decisions taken.

The Party Bureaucracy

Under the Central Committee and the Party Secretariat, the CCP operates an expansive bureaucracy that reaches into many aspects of government and society, and parts of which extend deep down into local governments.⁵⁹ The Party's anti-corruption body, the **Central Discipline Inspection Commission**, is represented on the Politburo Standing Committee. The heads of the next three most powerful departments in the Party bureaucracy sit one level lower, on the Politburo. Those departments are:

- **The Organization Department:** responsible for the recruitment of Party members and their training, career development, and assignment to jobs across the party and state, the legislatures, state-owned corporations, universities, and other public institutions.⁶⁰
- **The Propaganda (or "Publicity") Department:** responsible for the Party's messaging and for control of the media and ideology. In coordination with the Organization Department, the Propaganda Department manages the leaders of the Ministry of Culture; the newly constituted General Administration Press and Publication, Radio, Film, and Television; the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; *The People's Daily*; the Xinhua News Agency; and other media organizations.⁶¹
- **The Central Commission of Politics and Law:**⁶² responsible for ensuring Party control over the internal security apparatus. Its full membership is not publicized. Known members include the President of the Supreme People's Court, the Procurator-General of the Supreme People's Procuratorate (China's chief

⁵⁹ For a full list of departments, commissions, and offices under the Central Committee, in Chinese, see <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64114/>.

⁶⁰ For more information, see 中共中央组织部职能简介 (An Introduction to the Functions of the Party Central Committee Organization Department), on the website of *The People's Daily*, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64114/75347/14922667.html>.

⁶¹ For more information, see a brief introduction to the Propaganda Department's functions on the website of *The People's Daily*, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64114/75332/5230610.html>.

⁶² The Chinese name for the commission is 中共中央政法委. It is also known in English as the "Central Committee of Political Science and Law" and as the "Central Commission for Political and Legal Affairs."

prosecutor), the Minister of Public Security, the Minister of State Security, and the Minister of Justice.⁶³

Notable departments not represented at levels below the Politburo include the **United Front Work Department**, which is responsible for relations with the people of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, non-Communist groups, and ethnic minorities and Chinese living outside mainland China. The **International Department** handles relations with foreign political parties. It is a particularly influential player in China's relationships with fellow socialist countries, including North Korea. The **Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group Office** coordinates foreign policy.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA)

The Party's 2.25 million person army, the People's Liberation Army, reports to both a **Party Central Military Commission (CMC)** and a **State CMC**. Party General Secretary Xi Jinping heads both and the two bodies have identical memberships. They are effectively a single body, with the Party CMC the real locus of authority, exercising unified command over all China's armed forces. The Party CMC currently has a civilian chairman, two uniformed vice chairmen, and eight uniformed regular members. The eight are the Minister of Defense, the directors of the PLA's four headquarters departments, and the commanders of the Navy, Air Force, and strategic missile forces, known as the Second Artillery Corps. (See **Table 4** for details.)

Table 4. The 18th Central Committee's Party Central Military Commission

Appointed at the First Plenum of the 18th Central Committee, November 2012; Listed in rank order

Name and Year of Birth	CMC Position	Other Position(s)
Xi Jinping (b. 1953)	Chairman	Party General Secretary; State President; State CMC Chairman
Fan Changlong (b. 1947)	Vice Chairman	Party Politburo Member
Xu Qiliang (b. 1950)	Vice Chairman	Party Politburo Member
Chang Wanquan (b. 1949)	Member	State Councilor and Minister of National Defense
Fang Fenghui (b. 1951)	Member	Chief, PLA General Staff
Zhang Yang (b. 1951)	Member	Director, PLA General Political Department
Zhao Keshi (b. 1947)	Member	Director, PLA General Logistics Department
Zhang Youxia (b. 1950)	Member	Director, PLA General Armament Department
Wu Shengli (b. 1945)	Member	Commander, PLA Navy
Ma Xiaotian (b. 1949)	Member	Commander, PLA Air Force

⁶³ All five organizations are described as members of the commission in “周永康：政法机关要积极回应人民群众的关切期待” (Zhou Yongkang: Politics and Law Commission Authorities Must Respond Positively to the Concerns and Expectations of the Masses), *Xinhua News Service*, March 19, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2012-03/19/c_111675353.htm.

Name and Year of Birth	CMC Position	Other Position(s)
Wei Fenghe (b. 1954)	Member	Commander, PLA Second Artillery Corps

Source: Xinhua News Agency biographies; CRS research.

Notes: All members born before 1950 are expected to retire at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. Five of the 11 members fall into that category.

The CMC directs the armed forces through the four general departments, listed below in order of rank:⁶⁴

- **General Staff Department:** responsible for operations, intelligence, training, force structure, mobilization, and foreign affairs;
- **General Political Department:** responsible for Communist Party affairs, personnel, military media, and security;
- **General Logistics Department:** responsible for financial affairs and audits; housing, food, uniforms, and other supplies; military healthcare; military transportation; and capital construction; and
- **General Armament Department:** responsible for the PLA's weapons and equipment needs, its electronics and information infrastructure, and the manned space program

The four general departments direct the service branches: the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Second Artillery Corps. They also direct the seven military regions, also known as military area commands or theaters of war. The PLA Reserve Force and a paramilitary force, the People's Armed Police Force, which plays a major role in putting down domestic unrest, both report to both the Central Military Commission and the State's leading body, the State Council (see **Figure 4** for an organization chart).

The PLA's role in politics has been much debated. One leading U.S. expert describes the Party as having made "a deliberate decision to remove the military from elite politics and the most powerful decision-making councils, and to regularize and institutionalize its role in the policy process as a professional force." As evidence of that trend, he cites statistics on uniformed military representation on top Party bodies. The Communist Party's top decision-making body, the PSC, has had no uniformed military representation since 1997. Uniformed military officers hold just 2 of the current 25 spots on the Politburo, although nearly 20% of the members of the 17th Central Committee had military affiliations. Yet the military has a direct line to the Communist Party General Secretary, the top official in the Chinese political system, through the Central Military Commission. Senior military officers also sit on Party "Leading Small Groups" on such issues as foreign affairs, national security, and Taiwan affairs.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ "Structure and Organization of the Armed Forces," PRC Ministry of National Defense, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/ArmedForces/index.htm>.

⁶⁵ Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior Part Three: The Role of the Military in Foreign Policy," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 36 (January 6, 2012), pp. 3-6, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/104181>.

Figure 4. The People's Liberation Army



Source: Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 32. Color shading added by CRS.

Notes: Entities in red are represented on the Central Military Commission. The People's Armed Police reports to both the Central Military Commission and, through the Ministry of Public Security, to the State Council.

Military officers in academic positions have emerged in recent years as influential and generally hawkish media commentators and bloggers, although it is not clear how authoritative their statements are. Most are affiliated either with the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS), which the PLA describes as its “highest-level research institute and center of military science,” or the National Defense University, which educates and trains China’s senior commanding and staff officers and military researchers.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Well known commentators include Lieutenant General Ren Haiquan, a Vice President of AMS, and retired Major General Luo Yuan, who is affiliated with an AMS research society; Rear Admiral Zhang Zhaozhong, General Zhu Chenghu, and Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu of National Defense University; and Colonel Dai Xu, a researcher at an

The State

The second major institution of the Chinese political structure is the State. During the early decades of Communist rule, the Party and the State operated as one under a slogan trumpeting “the Party’s absolute and unified leadership.” In the late 1970s, however, the Communist Party began moves to separate Party and government functions, authorizing a cabinet, the State Council, and “people’s governments” at lower levels to manage the day-to-day administration of the country.⁶⁷ To ensure its control over the State system, the Party still maintains a robust presence inside the system. The top officials at each level of the State system routinely hold concurrent Party posts, although they often do not publicize them, and Party committees are embedded in the State Council, ministries, and government departments at every level. While powerful Communist Party bodies that exist in parallel to the State bodies set policy at all levels and make major decisions, the State system implements and executes policy. In recent decades, State leaders have been particularly focused on managing China’s economy, leaving “political” matters, such as ideology, personnel, and security, to the Party.

The personnel working for the government are civil servants. While most senior government officials are CCP members, party membership is not a requirement for higher government positions. In 2007, the newly appointed Minister of Health became the first person to rise to ministerial rank without being a member of the Communist Party or any of the satellite parties loyal to the Communist Party. He joined and became head of one of the minor parties shortly before stepping down from the Minister’s post in March 2013. The Minister of Science and Technology is chairman of another satellite party, the Zhigong Party.

China’s highest ranking state officials are the **State President** (*guojia zhuxi*) and **Vice President** (*guojia fuzhuxi*).⁶⁸ The positions are largely ceremonial and involve few duties. Since 1993, however, China’s Communist Party General Secretaries have found it useful to serve concurrently as State President because General Secretaries have no counterparts outside the non-Communist world. When Hu Jintao traveled to the United States for a state visit in January 2011, he did so in his capacity as China’s State President, although his real power derived from his position as General Secretary of the Communist Party.

The locus of power in the State system is the **State Council**, China’s cabinet. It is headed by a **Premier** (*zongli*), also sometimes referred to in English as Prime Minister, who serves concurrently on the Party’s Politburo Standing Committee. Because the State system manages the economy on a day-to-day basis, the Premier is effectively China’s most senior economic official, although he has other portfolios, too. On official organization charts, all ministries report to the State Council and ultimately to the Premier. In practice a number of ministries, including the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Culture, report directly to the Communist Party entities that oversee their work.

Below the Premier are four State Council **Vice Premiers**, one of whom (Zhang Gaoli) serves concurrently on the Politburo Standing Committee, and the remainder of whom serve concurrently as regular members of the Communist Party Politburo. Slightly below the Vice

institute at Peking University. See David Lague, “Special Report: China’s Military Hawks Take the Offensive,” *Reuters*, January 17, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/17/us-china-hawks-idUSBRE90G00C20130117>.

⁶⁷ For more information about the establishment of the state system as a separate political institution, see Zhou Guanghui, “Towards Good Government: Thirty Years of Administrative Reforms in China,” in *The Reform of Governance*, ed. Yu Keping (Leiden, The Netherlands and Beijing, China: Koninklijke Brill NV and Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010), pp. 137-180.

⁶⁸ A literal translation for the Chinese names, 主席 and 副主席, would be “chairman” and “vice chairman,” but China’s official translation is President and Vice President.

Premiers in rank are five **State Councilors**, none of whom serve on the Politburo. Each Vice Premier and State Councilor has a specific portfolio. The foreign affairs portfolio is not represented at the Vice Premier level or on the Politburo. Rather, China's most senior diplomat is a State Councilor, Yang Jiechi, who oversees the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Table 5. State Council Leaders

Installed March 2013

Name	State Council title(s)	Other titles	Birthdate	Likely portfolio
Li Keqiang	Premier	No. 2 ranked Politburo Standing Committee member	1955	Government administration; economy
Zhang Gaoli	No. 1 ranked Vice Premier	No. 7 ranked Politburo Standing Committee Member	1946	Assisting the Premier; economy
Liu Yandong	No. 2 ranked Vice Premier	Politburo member	1945	Education, science, culture, health, and sports
Wang Yang	No. 3 ranked Vice Premier	Politburo member	1955	Unknown
Ma Kai	No. 4 ranked Vice Premier	Politburo member; Party Secretary of Central State Organs Work Committee; President, Chinese Academy of Governance	1946	Unknown
Yang Jing	State Councilor; Secretary General of the State Council	Member of the Party Secretariat	1953	State Council affairs
Chang Wanquan	State Councilor	Minister of National Defense	1949	Military
Yang Jiechi	State Councilor		1950	Foreign Affairs
Guo Shengkun	State Councilor	Minister and Party Secretary, Ministry of Public Security; Commissioner General of Police	1954	Public security
Wang Yong	State Councilor	Chairman and Party Secretary, State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission	1955	Unknown

Source: "The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China," http://www.gov.cn/gjig/2005-08/01/content_18608.htm.

Notes: Information about likely portfolios represents analysis by CRS, based on the titles each leader holds. China does not typically announce the portfolios for its top officials.

China's **ministries** and **commissions**, which are subordinate to the State Council, are a fractious, highly competitive group of institutions with sometimes overlapping jurisdiction. Ministries are headed by **Ministers** and commissions by **Chairmen**. Each ministry or commission has an embedded Communist Party committee that makes major decisions for the institution and oversees ideology and personnel matters. In most cases, the Minister or Chairman serves concurrently as the head of his institution's Communist Party committee. One exception is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the top ranking vice minister has traditionally served as the ministry's party secretary.⁶⁹

Despite their subordination to the State Council and CCP, and the CCP's role in appointing their leaders, the ministries can wield decisive tactical influence over policy by virtue of their role in drafting laws and regulations and implementing the sometimes ambiguous national policy goals set by top leaders. After General Secretary Hu Jintao's 2006 call for "indigenous innovation" to be "the core of national competitiveness," for example, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) led the way in developing often controversial industrial policies and regulations to support domestic firms over their foreign rivals, fleshing out just what "indigenous innovation" meant. MIIT's moves included attempts to make a domestic technology the standard for 3G mobile telecommunications in China, to require that all new computers in China be sold with Chinese-made censorship software pre-installed, and to require preference for domestic suppliers in Chinese government procurement.⁷⁰ Not all ministries and commissions are created equal. MIIT and the National Development and Reform Commission, both considered "super-ministries," are more powerful in policy debates than other ministries.

Entities under the State Council include four State Council offices, each with its own professional staff. The **State Council's Legislative Affairs Office** (SCLAO) plays a frequently decisive role in the formulation of national regulations and laws. It drafts the government's legislative agenda on a year-to-year basis and then works with relevant government ministries and agencies to implement the agenda, including overseeing the drafting of regulations and laws.⁷¹ Regulations are promulgated by the State Council or by individual ministries. Laws must be passed by the National People's Congress. The **State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office** advises the Chinese leadership on matters related to the two Special Administrative Regions, both of which returned to Chinese sovereignty in the 1990s after long periods as colonies of Britain and Portugal respectively. The other two offices are a Research Office and an Overseas Chinese Affairs Office.

⁶⁹ For more discussion of these issues, see Peng Mei and Ge Qian, "Zhang Zhijun Appointed Secretary of Foreign Ministry Party Committee, First-ranking Vice Minister (张志军任外交部党委书记 排名第一的副部长)," *Southern Metropolis News* (南方都市报), December 22, 2010.

⁷⁰ James McGregor, *China's Drive for Indigenous Innovation: A Web of Industrial Policies*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, July 2010, <http://www.uschamber.com/reports/chinas-drive-indigenous-innovation-web-industrial-policies>. Barry Naughton, "China's Emergence from Economic Crisis," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 29 (August 11, 2009), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/5473>.

⁷¹ The Legislative Affairs Office is also responsible for advising the State Council on the legal implications of ratifying or participating in international treaties, for issuing legal interpretations of administration regulations, and for reviewing local regulations and ministerial and agency regulations for consistency with national-level laws and regulations and China's constitution. For more information, see the Legislative Affairs Office's Chinese-language website at <http://www.chinalaw.gov.cn/article/jgzn/>.

The National People's Congress (NPC)

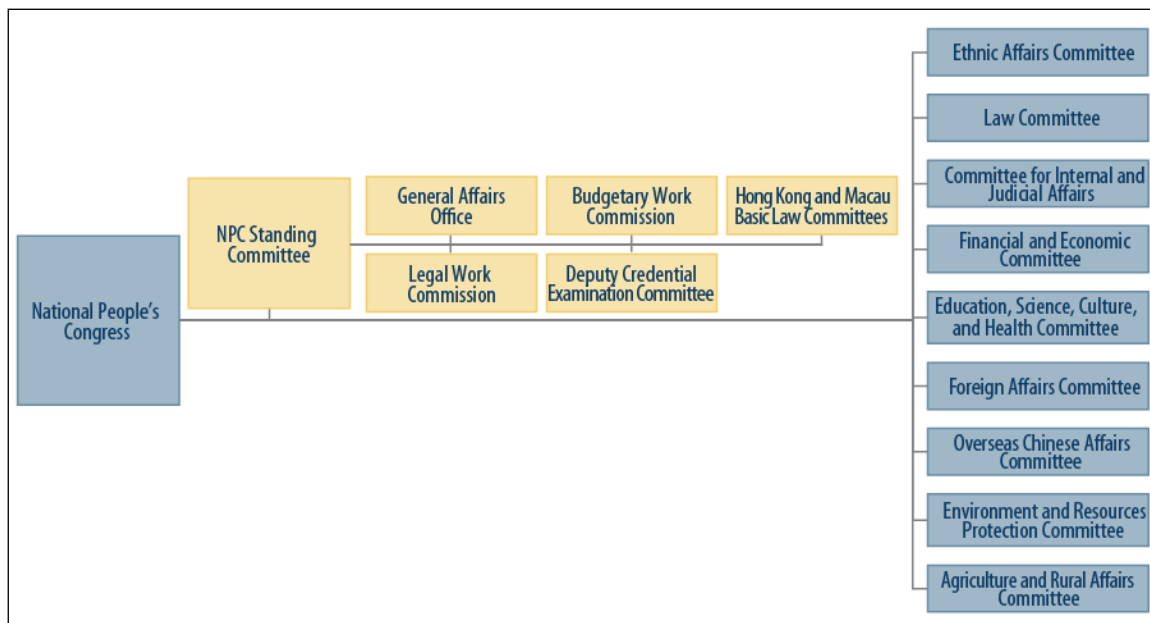
The public theater of the NPC's work is centered on its 10-day-long annual full session. It is held every March and attended by all of the NPC's nearly 3,000 deputies. The full session in March 2013 marked the start of a new five-year Congress, the 12th, and approved new State and Congress leaders, including a new President, Vice President, and Premier, and new Vice Premiers and State Councilors. At the annual full sessions, NPC deputies almost always vote to approve the reports, laws, and candidates put before them, usually by overwhelming margins. NPC delegates do occasionally push back, however. At the March 2013 session of the NPC, 25% of deputies withheld their support from the Supreme People's Court's report to the Congress, and nearly 22% withheld their support from the Ministry of Finance's budget report.⁷² Unlike the U.S. Congress, the National People's Congress does not pass spending bills. Rather, it votes to approve the budget presented by the Minister of Finance. The power of individual NPC deputies to exercise oversight is largely restricted to the right to submit proposals advocating for reforms or demanding better implementation of laws or regulations, to which officials are required to respond in writing.

Because the annual full session of the congress is so brief, much of the NPC's work is undertaken by its **Standing Committee**, which currently has 175 members and convenes every two months.⁷³ The Standing Committee is composed of recently retired senior Party and state officials, the heads of the eight democratic parties, and "leading figures from every field or profession."⁷⁴ Other important NPC bodies that meet outside of the annual session include nine specialized committees of deputies, and six staff and expert bodies under the Standing Committee. Like the State Council, the NPC has a Communist Party organization embedded within it. (For more on the NPC, see "The Legislature: Strong on Paper, Weak in Practice" and "Weak Rule of Law.")

⁷² “两会报告反对票5年来最高 最高法院获605张” (“Highest Number of Opposing Votes for Reports at the Two Congresses in Five Years, Supreme People's Court Gets 605”), *Caixin*, March 17, 2013.

⁷³ For a list of National People's Congress Standing Committee meetings since 2004, see the NPC's Chinese-language website: http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/cwhhy/node_2433.htm.

⁷⁴ Jiang Jinsong, op cit. p. 99.

Figure 5. The National People's Congress

Source: “全国人民代表大会” (“National People’s Congress”), Xinhua News Agency, http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-11/15/content_2221419.htm.

Notes: The members of the nine special committees are all NPC deputies. The members of the six entities under the NPC Standing Committee are staff and experts.

The NPC is the uppermost layer of a nation-wide system of People’s Congresses. These congresses are loosely linked together in process and function. Only deputies for the lowest level of People’s Congresses are directly elected. Traditionally, even at the lowest level, candidate lists are controlled by the Party, and elections are uncontested. Since 2011, however, China has seen a wave of independent candidates contesting elections for People’s Congresses in city districts and townships. Such candidates have faced forms of official harassment, including intrusive surveillance, extra-legal detention, intimidation of their supporters, censorship, and election irregularities aimed at keeping them off ballots or preventing their votes from being counted. Nonetheless, several independent candidates have succeeded in being elected.⁷⁵

The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)

The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) system officially exists to engage in “political consultation” with the Communist Party, perform “democratic supervision” of the Party, and “participate in the deliberation and administration of state affairs.” The Communist Party routinely holds up the PPCC system as a core part of China’s “socialist democracy,” characterized by “multi-party cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China.”⁷⁶ In practice, the CPPCC system gives select prominent citizens,

⁷⁵ For details of the sort of harassment faced by independent candidates, see the tale of Liu Ping, a thwarted candidate for municipal People’s Congress in Jiangxi Province. Liu Chang, “Why Liu Ping’s Candidacy Failed,” *Caixin Online*, June 7, 2011, <http://english.caixin.com/2011-06-07/100266830.html>. For information about successful candidates, see 周华蕾 (Zhou Hualei), “新科代表：主动参选” (“New Branch of Deputies: Actively Contesting Elections”), *南方周末* (Southern Weekend), December 30, 2011, <http://www.infzm.com/content/67068>. See also Congressional Executive Commission on China, *Annual Report 2012*, October 10, 2012, p. 128.

⁷⁶ National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, *Nature and Position of the CPPCC*, June 29, 2010, <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn>.

including non-Communists, an approved platform to make suggestions about aspects of public policy, but does not oblige the Communist Party to act upon those suggestions. The institution can thus ignite and influence policy debates, but is essentially powerless. The Chinese government refers to CPPCC members as “political advisors.”

The Minor Political Parties

As mentioned above, in addition to the Chinese Communist Party, China has eight other minor political parties. Their role is strictly circumscribed, but the Communist Party uses their existence to argue that China operates a “multi-party cooperation system,” and is therefore not strictly a one-party state.⁷⁷ Crucially, the minor political parties are all required to accept the permanent leadership of the Communist Party. They are expected to work “hand in hand” with the Communist Party in “developing socialism with Chinese characteristics,” and they are barred from operating as opposition parties. With each party’s yearly intake of new members capped by the Communist Party, the combined members of the minor parties number fewer than 1 million, compared to the Communist Party’s 82.6 million members. The smallest of the parties claims a membership of just 2,100. The minor parties exercise modest influence in the political system by virtue of the Communist Party’s policy of allotting the minor parties leadership positions in the state bureaucracy, the legislatures, and the political advisory bodies. The heads of the minor parties all serve as vice-chairmen of the National People’s Congress, making them state leaders for protocol purposes. In 2007, the current Minister of Science and Technology, Wan Gang, became the first minor party member in the post-Mao era to be named to a ministerial post. He serves concurrently as chairman of the Zhi Gong Party, whose mandate is to represent Chinese who have returned to China after living overseas or who have relatives living overseas.⁷⁸ As of 2011, the leadership teams of the Supreme People’s Court, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, and the ministries, commissions, offices, and bureaus under the State Council included just 19 non-Communist Party members.⁷⁹

Other Political Actors

In addition to the formal institutions of government and party power, the PRC political system is increasingly influenced by other political actors, sometimes referred to as “policy entrepreneurs.”⁸⁰ Some of these influential actors operate opaquely and behind the scenes, making it difficult to determine the exact extent of their influence on any given policy issue. Others are playing an increasingly visible role in debating, recommending, and influencing particular policy actions. The media plays an important role in amplifying the voices of the other actors.

⁷⁷ For more information about the minor political parties, see State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Political Party System*, White Paper, Beijing, China, November 2007, <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6303123.html>.

⁷⁸ The eight minor parties are the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang (RCCK), China Democratic League (CDL), China National Democratic Construction Association (CNDCA), China Association for Promoting Democracy (CAPD), Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party (CPWDP), China Zhi Gong Dang (CZGD), Jiu San Society, and Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (TSL).

⁷⁹ 彭美 Peng Mei and 欣华 Xin Hua, “中央统战部：中国没必要组建新政党” (“Central Committee United Front Work Department: China Does Not Need New Political Parties”), *南方都市报* (Southern Metropolitan News), June 30, 2011.

⁸⁰ For discussion of the role of policy entrepreneurs in Chinese policymaking, see Andrew Mertha, “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 200 (December 2009).

Traditional Media, New Media, and a Wired Citizenry

Control of the media has always been an important plank of Communist Party rule in China, enabling the Party to “guide public opinion” with its version of events, and to exclude narratives that might challenge Party positions or actions. Party media controls remain in place, managed by the Party Central Committee’s Propaganda Department. With the reduction of state subsidies to the traditional media, the rise of commercially driven media, and the rapid spread of new information technologies, however, the Chinese media landscape has become increasingly diverse, eroding the Party’s ability to control public discourse as comprehensively as it once did.

Traditional, tightly controlled Communist Party media outlets, such as the Communist Party Central Committee’s *People’s Daily*, now co-exist with more lively commercially driven publications. Such publications put a provocative spin on Party-approved news, expose scandals, and report on policy debates, even though they may share the same owners as staid Party papers and are also subject to Party Propaganda Department censorship. One of China’s most muscular tabloids, the *Global Times*, is a sister paper to the *People’s Daily*. The crusading *Southern Metropolis News* and *Southern Weekend*, both known for their daring investigative journalism, are sister papers to the mouthpiece of the Guangdong Communist Party Committee, *Southern Daily*. China’s financial media, which tend to be less tightly censored than the mainstream media, often showcase some of the most probing analysis of policy issues, with publications such as *Caixin* *New Century Weekly* and *Caijing* being particularly closely read by elites. Because of its reach, television is the most tightly controlled medium in China. China Central Television (CCTV), which operates multiple channels on multiple platforms, serves as a tool of the Communist Party, relaying Party-approved messages to China’s citizens. It also, however, hosts numerous talk shows and magazine-style programs that offer a range of opinions on policy issues.

The most significant development in the media landscape in recent years has been the explosive growth of Twitter-like services known as “weibo” (literally micro-blogs), which have empowered citizens to share news and views directly with each other, and thus put pressure on the traditional media to cover stories they might otherwise have ignored, and on the authorities to address problems they might otherwise have swept under the carpet. Some micro-bloggers have millions of followers and the power to change the terms of public debate with a single post. As of January 2013, 42.1% of Chinese were online, with the total number of Internet users reaching 564 million. Nearly 75% of Chinese users accessed the Internet on mobile devices, and 309 million Chinese were weibo users.⁸¹ Authorities police weibo posts. In the wake of the scandal involving the former Party Secretary of Chongqing, they boasted of deleting 210,000 weibo posts and making six arrests for online “rumor mongering.”⁸² In an attempt to turn weibo to the Party’s advantage, however, the CCP has also encouraged official agencies and officials to open weibo accounts as a new tool in their propaganda toolboxes, and the official Xinhua News Agency now releases news on weibo as well as on its other platforms. Many Chinese officials monitor weibo and other Internet discussions as a guide to public opinion, even though in China, as in many societies, extreme views tend to dominate Internet-based discourse. Chinese officials sometimes tell foreign officials about the pressure they feel from the nationalist views of China’s “netizens,” suggesting that it may be a factor in Chinese foreign policy.

⁸¹ China Internet Network Information Center, 第31届中国互联网络发展状况统计报告 (31st Statistical Report on Internet Development in China), January 15, 2013, http://www.cnnic.cn/gywm/shzr/shzrdt/201301/t20130115_38518.htm.

⁸² Liu Yang, “清理1万条信息和42家网站 (Cleaned Up 210,000 Posts; Closed 42 Websites),” *The People’s Daily*, April 13, 2012, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2012-04/13/nw.D110000renmrb_20120413_1-04.htm.

Big Business

Boosted by government policies restricting foreign investment and private investment in “strategic industries,” flagship Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in such fields as oil, electric power, finance, telecommunications, and defense have emerged as global powerhouses in recent years. Three Chinese SOEs are among the top 10 firms on the Fortune Global 500 list for 2012.⁸³ The leaders of such firms, and indeed all Chinese SOEs, are assigned to their jobs by the Party’s Organization Department and thus may move back and forth between jobs in business and government, and have a formal place in the Chinese political system. In the 17th Central Committee, 22 SOE bosses were alternate members of the Party’s Central Committee, and 1 was a full member.⁸⁴ The State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC) currently oversees 115 central government-level SOEs.⁸⁵

Analysts say SOE bosses are able to influence policymaking and agenda-setting by virtue of their bureaucratic rank, their technical knowledge of their industries and global markets, and the economic might of their firms. With their career advancement in the Party’s hands, however, SOE bosses understand that they are expected not just to produce strong corporate results, but also to ensure that their firms advance the Party’s interests.⁸⁶

The leaders of the largest private firms are outside the Party’s personnel assignment system, but are often also significant players in the Chinese political system. One scholar identifies property developers, a group that includes both private and state-owned giants, as “one of the most powerful special interest groups in present-day China,” blaming it for holding up passage of an anti-monopoly law and resisting government efforts to rein in a dangerous property bubble.⁸⁷

The Party has routinely awarded prominent businesspeople, from both state-owned and privately owned firms, positions as deputies to national and local People’s Congresses and Political Consultative Conferences. According to Bloomberg News, as of 2011, the richest 70 delegates to the National People’s Congress had a combined net worth of \$89.8 billion.⁸⁸ In 2002, the Party formally welcomed private business leaders into its ranks.

Official and Quasi-Official Research Institutes

According to University of Pennsylvania global rankings that have been embraced in China, the country now has 429 think tanks, the second-largest number in the world after the United States, with 6 Chinese think tanks ranked among the top 100 globally.⁸⁹ Most of the institutions on the

⁸³ The three are Sinopec Group, China National Petroleum Corporation, and State Grid Corporation of China, ranked 5th, 6th, and 7th, respectively. CNN Money, *Global 500*, 2012, http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/global500/2012/full_list/index.html.

⁸⁴ Erica Downs and Michal Meidan, “Business and Politics in China: The Oil Executive Reshuffle of 2011,” *China Security*, no. 19 (2011), pp. 3-21.

⁸⁵ A full list of central-level SOEs is available, in Chinese, on the SASAC website at <http://www.sasac.gov.cn/n1180/n1226/n2425/>.

⁸⁶ Erica Downs and Michal Meidan, “Business and Politics in China: The Oil Executive Reshuffle of 2011,” *China Security*, no. 19 (2011), pp. 3-21.

⁸⁷ Cheng Li, “China’s Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012 (Part 4: Top Leaders of Major State-Owned Enterprises),” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 34 (February 22, 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/68001>.

⁸⁸ “China’s Billionaire People’s Congress Makes Capitol Hill Look Like Pauper,” *Bloomberg News*, February 27, 2012.

⁸⁹ James G. McGann, PhD, *2012 Global Go To Think Tanks Report and Policy Advice*, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania, January 28, 2013, <http://www.gotothinktank.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2012-Global-Go-To-Think-Tank-Report.pdf>.

list would be better known in China as public policy **research institutes**. Many are affiliated either with an official agency, such as the Ministry of State Security's China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), or with universities. Such centers make their influence felt in the policy process in part by accepting commissions from the Party or state to write reports on policy issues, and by self-generating reports that they submit to policymakers. Experts attached to the institutes also often serve as formal and informal advisors to official bodies, publish broadly, and may maintain a domestic media profile, accepting interviews, participating in television chat shows, and penning media commentaries. Such experts also play an important role in informing the outside world about Chinese policy discourse through meetings at home and abroad with foreign scholars, officials, and visitors from the U.S. Congress, as well as through attendance at international conferences and publications in international journals.

Notably, all of the Chinese think tanks named in the University of Pennsylvania survey are located in either Beijing or Shanghai, the two cities that dominate the policy discourse in China. Only one of the Chinese think tanks named in the rankings could be described as independent (Unirule Institute of Economics), and it is in the category of think tanks with small budgets.

Top-Ranked Chinese Think Tanks

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (No. 17 among think tanks globally)

China Institute of International Studies (No. 38 among think tanks globally)

China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (No. 48 among think tanks globally)

Center for International and Strategic Studies (No. 63 among think tanks globally)

Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (No. 73 among think tanks globally)

Development Research Center of the State Council (No. 100 among think tanks globally)

Central Party School (No. 12 among party-affiliated think tanks globally)

Unirule Institute of Economics (No. 14 among think tanks globally with operating budgets of less than \$5 million/year)

Source: University of Pennsylvania, *2012 Global Go To Think Tanks Report and Policy Advice*, January 28, 2013.

University Academics

China's academic community includes more than 1,100 degree-granting institutions.⁹⁰ Their faculty, even if not attached to policy research institutes, may be players in policy debates as authors of reports and influential articles and books, as government advisors, and as media commentators. More than four dozen Chinese universities are under the management of the military or central government ministries other than the Ministry of Education; many of them have a direct line into policy as a result.⁹¹ Notably, universities in China are not independent. They have Communist Party committees that act like Party Committees in other institutions, making major decisions for the university and managing ideology, personnel, propaganda, and

⁹⁰ The number of degree-granting institutions at the end of 2010 was 1,112. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, *中国教育概况 2010年全国教育事业发展情况* (*General Information About Chinese Education: 2010 National Situation of Development in the Education Field*), November 14, 2011, <http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s5990/201111/126550.html>.

⁹¹ A list of universities affiliated with central government ministries and commissions is available on the website of the *People's Daily*, at http://edu.people.gkcx.eol.cn/schoolInfoSearch/zybw/zybw_1.htm.

financial matters. As noted above, 32 universities have quasi ministerial bureaucratic rank. (See “The Distorting Influence of Bureaucratic Rank.”) The China University Alumni Association ranks universities by the number of members of the current Communist Party Central Committee they can count among their alumni. The 2013 list is shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Universities Ranked By Number of Alumni Among Current Communist Party Central Committee Members

Ran k	University	Location	Number of Alumni Who Are Current Central Committee Members
1	China Renmin University	Beijing	27
2	Tsinghua University	Beijing	26
3	Peking University	Beijing	24
4	Jilin University	Changchun	23
5	Nankai University	Tianjin	12
5	Harbin Institute of Technology	Harbin	12
7	Fudan University	Shanghai	11
8	Shandong University	Jinan	9
8	Hunan University	Chansha	9
10	Nanjing University	Nanjing	7
10	Beijing Normal University	Beijing	7

Source: 2013年中国大学中央委员校友排行榜（第十八届）（2013 Ranking of Chinese Universities by Central Committee Alumni – 18th Central Committee), 中国校友会网 (China University Alumni Association Network), <http://www.cuaa.net/cur/2013/11.shtml>.

Officially Sponsored Associations and Societies

In 2011, China had 1,834 officially registered “social organizations” at the national level, and nearly 25,000 at the provincial level. Most are what Western scholars refer to as GONGOs, or “government-organized non-government organizations.”⁹² Some such organizations have been criticized as little more than retirement homes for officials who have had to leave office because of age limits. Others, however, play an influential role. The fact that GONGO leaders are usually recently retired senior officials means that they have status and deep relationships in government that can make them effective bureaucratic players. Under-staffed ministries and Communist Party departments often outsource parts of their work to GONGOs, from drafting standards and staffing legislative drafting committees, to organizing conferences. GONGOs also sometimes act as proxies for the government at international meetings. The number of GONGOs that each agency sponsors varies. The Foreign Ministry sponsors 14, including the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, a frequent participant in international arms control dialogues. The

⁹² Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *中国民政统计年鉴* (China Civil Affairs Statistical Yearbook 2012), ed. Xu Li (中国统计出版社/China Statistical Press, 2012), p. 108.

Ministry of Industry and Information Technology sponsors 41, many of them industry associations that bring perspectives from corporate leaders to bear on policy issues.⁹³

Grassroots NGOs

Grassroots non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also exist in China, although in most of the country, to be officially registered as “social organizations” they need to find a government department willing to serve as their sponsor. Guangdong Province is the first to experiment with a policy of waiving this requirement. Unable to line up sponsors, some register as “civil non-commercial institutions” and others as businesses. Despite official obstacles, which include harassment from China’s security apparatus, a number of grassroots NGOs have been successful in raising public awareness about such issues as environmental protection and public health and in providing services to under-served populations, such as the disabled. The Beijing Yirenping Center, for example, focuses on combating discrimination on the basis of health status or disability. Yirenping’s advocacy has involved exploiting openings in the Chinese political system to draw attention to its causes, usually with the help of sympathetic journalists. Among other tactics, it has launched lawsuits, filed official information disclosure requests, organized petitions and open letters, and persuaded People’s Congress and People’s Political Consultative Conference delegates to submit proposals on their behalf calling for revision of laws discriminating against such groups as carriers of Hepatitis B and HIV.⁹⁴

Chinese Authorities’ View of Political Reform

China’s Premier Wen Jiabao, who retired in March 2013, made tantalizing comments over the years about the need for political reform in China. In a 2008 interview with the U.S. network CNN, Wen spoke of the need “to gradually improve the democratic election system,” “build an independent and just judicial system,” and have the government “accept oversight by the news media and other parties.”⁹⁵ In a second interview with CNN in 2010, Wen declared that “freedom of speech is indispensable,” and that “All political parties, organizations, and all people should abide by the constitution and laws without any exception.”⁹⁶ In March 2012, at a press conference marking the closing of the annual full session of the National People’s Congress, Wen spoke of the need for “political structural reform,” and particularly of the need for “reform in the leadership system of the Party and the state,” although he did not clarify what kind of reform the “leadership system” needed. He also startled journalists by embracing the Arab spring, declaring that, “The Arab people’s demand and pursuit of democracy must be respected and realistically answered. Further, I feel that this trend of democracy is unstoppable by any forces.”⁹⁷

⁹³ GONGOs can be searched by sponsoring agency on the website of the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, using a Chinese-language search platform accessed at <http://www.chinanpo.gov.cn/npowork/dc/searchOrgList.do?action=searchOrgList>.

⁹⁴ For examples of recent Yirenping activism, see *Many Activities on Human Rights of People with Disability were carried out at the Beginning of 2012*, Beijing Yirenping report, January 30, 2012, http://www.asiacatalyst.org/blog/2012/02/Yirenping_Center_Reports_On_Disability_Action.pdf.

⁹⁵ CNN, *Fareed Zakaria GPS: Interviews with Wen Jiabao, Malcolm Gladwell*, August 23 2009, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0908/23/fzgps.01.html>. The Wen interview originally aired on September 29, 2008. The August 23, 2009, edition of Fareed Zakaria GPS re-broadcast the interview.

⁹⁶ CNN, *Fareed Zakaria GPS: Interview with Wen Jiabao*, October 3, 2010, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1010/03/fzgps.01.html>.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Premier Wen Jiabao Meets the Press,” transcript, March 15, 2012, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t914983.htm>. For discussion of Wen’s remarks and their reporting

Reflecting the diversity of views among top leaders, however, other top officials have instead insisted on the limits of political reform in China. In widely reported remarks to the annual full session of the National People's Congress in March 2011, Wu Bangguo, at the time the NPC Chairman and the Party's number two-ranked official, reinforced the Party's insistence on its permanent, unchallenged rule. He declared that China's leaders had "made a solemn declaration that we'll not employ a system of multiple parties holding office in rotation." He also foreswore any separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers, and any adoption of a bicameral or federal system, warning that China would risk an "abyss of internal disorder" if it deviated from the "correct political orientation."⁹⁸

Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping echoed Wen's call for abiding by the constitution when he said in December 2012 that no one "has the special right to overstep the Constitution and law."⁹⁹ He also declared in January 2013 remarks that, "Power should be restricted by the cage of regulations."¹⁰⁰ He has not, however, called for an independent judiciary. Rather, he has stressed the need "to uphold the principle that the Party should supervise its own conduct."¹⁰¹

Over the years, the Communist Party's Propaganda Department has been active in justifying the Party's permanent monopoly on power. In a 2009 political tract, *Six 'Why's': Answers to Some Major Questions*, it took on such questions as, "Why must we uphold the system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, and not have a Western-style multi-party system?" Many of the answers the book offered focused on claims that Western political systems are inefficient and unable to deliver the kind of fast-paced economic growth that China needs to pull all its people out of poverty. Among the many ills associated with competitive two-party or multi-party politics, the book argued, are deepened social divisions and an unstable political situation, which hobbles economic development.¹⁰²

While the Communist Party has shown little to no interest in reforms that might threaten its rule, for most of the last 30 years it has been undertaking what a leading Chinese political scientist, Yu Keping, calls "reform of state governance and the administrative systems of the state," intended to improve China's governance in ways that might help solidify the Party's hold on power.¹⁰³ Recent efforts have focused on ways of increasing the legitimacy of the political system by making it more competitive, transparent, and participatory, without going so far as to cede the Party's ultimate control over all major decisions.

In the 1980s, in an effort to foster greater support for local leaders among the community, create incentives for more effective local governance, and provide a disincentive for local government

in China, see Alice L. Miller, "Splits in the Politburo Leadership?" and Joseph Fewsmith, "Political Reform Was Never on the Agenda," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 34 (February 22, 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67996>.

⁹⁸ Bao Daozu, "Top Legislator Warns of Chaos Unless Correct Path Is Taken," *China Daily*, March 11, 2011, online edition, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011npc/2011-03/11/content_12152319.htm.

⁹⁹ "CPC's new chief pledges to implement rule of law," *Xinhua News Agency*, December 4, 2012; Zhao Yinan, "Uphold Constitution, Xi says," *China Daily*, December 5, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ "Xi Jinping Vows 'Power Within Cage of Regulations,'" *Xinhua News Agency*, January 22, 2013.

¹⁰¹ "Transcript: Xi Jinping's Speech at the Unveiling of Then New Chinese Leadership," *South China Morning Post*, November 15, 2012.

¹⁰² Theory Bureau of the Communist Party Central Committee Propaganda Department, 六个为什么: 对几个重大问题的回答 (*Six 'Why's': Answers to Some Major Questions*) (Beijing, China: Xuexi Chubanshe, 2009), pp. 73, 56-57.

¹⁰³ Yu Keping, "30 Years of China's Governance Reform (1978 to 2008)," in *The Reform of Governance*, ed. Yu Keping (Koninklijke Brill NV and Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010), pp. 4-14.

corruption, the Party sanctioned limited direct elections for leaders at level of the village, an administrative unit outside the formal Chinese administrative hierarchy. Those elections continue, although village party officials, who are not subject to popular vote, determine what name or names may appear on the ballot. The rules also bar candidates from running on behalf of a political party or as part of a slate of candidates and restrict public campaigning to a few minutes of public remarks immediately before the vote. In his March 2012 press conference, then-Premier Wen pronounced village elections a success and said he saw no reason why such direct elections could not eventually move up to the level of the township, and even the county.¹⁰⁴

More recent innovations include efforts to introduce elections on a limited scope in workplaces.¹⁰⁵ The Party has also introduced public hearings, begun posting select draft legislation for public comment, and adopted a set of open government information regulations to improve the transparency of government. Comprehensive ministerial and provincial government websites are a product of this initiative.¹⁰⁶ Although the Party has touted these and other political reforms with great fanfare, they have their limitations and appear to be designed to head off demands for Chinese citizens to have a direct role in selecting their top leaders, rather than to pave the way for citizens to claim such a role.

Author Information

Susan V. Lawrence
Specialist in Asian Affairs

Michael F. Martin
Specialist in Asian Affairs

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¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Premier Wen Jiabao Meets the Press," transcript, March 15, 2012, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t914983.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ For more information on China's experiments with "intra-Party democracy," see Cheng Li, "Intra-Party Democracy in China: Should We Take It Seriously?" *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 30 (November 19, 2009), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/5413>.

¹⁰⁶ The China Law Center at Yale Law School maintains a useful website with links to the full texts of China's open government information regulations in both English and Chinese: <http://www.law.yale.edu/intellecualife/openinformation.htm>.

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